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HARRY IDAHO

This is the Story

THIS is a story of the early days of the state of Idaho, Nevada and even of the Mormon settlement in Utah. "Shoshoni" Hale, so called because of his friendship with the Indians, was travelling south on foot, as the story opens, in search of his horse which had been stolen. The "Harry Idaho" of the tale is Harriet Prescott, grand-daughter of Old Idaho, who discovered the "Lost Diggings" gold mine in '45. She is a girl of beauty and sense, ready for high adventure at the moment when "Shoshoni" arrived at her little cabin in the valley. Their adventures with the Indians and their love affair makes up the bulk of the book, which has not one dull moment. The book is filled with mystery, excitement, gun-play and love, the four essential ingredients to a western yarn.

*Also by Hugh Pendexter*

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HARRY IDAHO

by

HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "Kings of the Missouri," etc.



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CHAPTER I

THE MAN WITH THE GUNS

BELOW the rim of the Bitter Root Mountains the sun was kindling a mighty fire for a hot day's work in the Snake River basin. It lacked an hour of sun-up when "Shoshoni" Hale parted from his companion a few miles north of the Payette River and resumed his quest. That his might be a grim business was suggested by the .44 Henry repeating rifle, the aristocrat among long guns, and the two eight-inch Colt revolvers of the popular .36 calibre. There were but few men in this summer of 'sixty-five who did not carry arms in the territory of Idaho during the frenzied race for gold, but even the road agent and the killer seldom carried a rifle and two hand guns.

As Hale picked his way through the clumps of sage brush he kept his gaze on the ground, searching for signs in the bunch-grass. He had no eyes for the glowing east and the many shades of purple and violet, the colour heritage of arid lands only. By midday the plains would be a sickly yellow or sombre russet brown or a depressing gray.

Now it was as if the doors of a subterranean furnace were flung open while a new world was being created. Far off mountain peaks, unseen during the haze of broad day, stood forth high in the heavens, peaks of amethyst and sapphire, floating in space, as their bases remained lost in the shadows. As the magic of the coming day increased in potency the earth shadows shrank and

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range after range took their places below the isolated elevations, until from base to top the deeply sculptured plains were revealed most minutely. If Hale lifted his head to stare at this fairy world, the real Idaho, it was to take advantage of the morning light and search the background of the basin.

By the time he was within a mile of the river this miracle of a restored earth had passed its climax, and the mountains began to withdraw behind the veil of violet haze. Where all had been distinct and definite, although many miles distant, now all was blurred, even in the foreground. Hale's wide eyes, grayish-green like the sage, half-closed as the increasing light became a physical offence. By contrast the shadow of ledge or bluff was a thing of ebony, opaque and of substance. On many a cloudless morning Hale had witnessed this coming and vanishing of the mountains and vaguely knew the miracle somehow fitted into his scheme of life and satisfied a soul hunger, but on this particular day his mind was blind to all except his errand.

As his tall form breasted the sage closer to the river he halted and sniffed at the dry air. Wood was burning nearby, and he thrilled with the hope he was about to come upon the quarry whom he and his camp mate had been following for several days, but whose trail had been lost for twenty-four hours. He shifted the rifle from the hollow of his arm and scouted toward a fringe of cottonwood that blocked his view of the river bank. Sunflowers and rabbit brush, brilliant cousin of the goldenrod, broke the monotony of the grayish-green colour scheme, but Hale saw only the thin smoke rising in a straight line above the trees.

When he and his companion lost the trail they knew the man was making either for Idaho City on Moore's Creek, or Boise City on the river of that name. He had struck south for Boise so that the fellow, if he had

gone there, might not have too great a lead in escaping into Utah or California.

But with the smoke just ahead his doubts vanished and he smiled in grim complacency and covered the quarter of a circle to beyond the lower end of the growth. On finishing this stealthy manœuvre he halted in chagrin ; instead of discovering a camp-fire, he was looking at a double log cabin, flanked by the lush green of cultivated land, where the fine yellowish-white dust deposit had been blessed by water and sown by man.

"Vegetable farmer ! Luck of a dog !" he growled, throwing his rifle over his shoulder and striding forward.

The man he sought would not be living in a cabin and raising vegetables ; rather, he would be lurking in some box cañon or riding desperately for the cover of some town before taking a southern trail.

Before Hale could make the corner of the house he was confronted by a man of his own stature, but much older ; for the long hair and beard were snow-white. Hale sensed the absence of hospitality, the moment he encountered the frosty eyes. The lean face of the trader hardened and coming to a halt he gruffly saluted :—

"How d'do."

The old man combed a hand through his beard and eyed him suspiciously, his quick gaze taking in each detail of the stranger's dress and weapons.

"Howdy," he responded. "You're no miner." The coldness of his faded blue eyes became less obvious. "You're rigged out like a mountain man of the old days, only you ain't old enough to be one of them."

"Neither miner nor mountain man. I've been working on the wagon road up north."

"That would be Cap'n John Mullan's road. It ain't any great shakes I take it from what I hear."

"Folks are a heap disappointed when it comes to winter travel," admitted Hale. "But that's because of the snow and not Mullan."

"You can't have had much doing in that line for two or three years," mused the old man, holding his ground as if barring the way.

"I've been hunting since work on the road finished."

"But you ain't done any hunting for gold, you say. Queer guns for a hunter, them two big hand guns."

"That depends on your game."

The old man found this curt retort containing something sinister. His tall form stiffened and he harshly demanded :—

"Be you an officer of the law?"

Hale shook his head; then, as if reading the other's suspicions, he quietly added :—

"And I'm not a law breaker."

"Glad to hear the last. Glad to hear the first, too, as some of our law officers ain't much better'n them that they're sp'osed to chase."

A faint smile twisted Hale's lips. After a pause he politely said :—

"Don't let me keep you from your victuals. I only want to know if you've seen a man pass here with a black mare, marked with a white star on the right hind quarter."

Black? With a white star? Two days ago. Fорded ten rods above the house. Didn't call. Made south toward Boise City."

"Thanks. I guessed it right. Stranger, that mare was stolen from me. I'm going after her if the chase takes me to Mexico."

"Then you're crazy even if you do pack so many guns," snorted the old man. "Folks in Payette Valley will tell you 'Old Idaho' is queer for growing vegetables

instead of hunting gold ; but even he knows better'n to try to git back stolen property once the thieves have cached it south of the Boise. They got a horse from me early this spring. I kept my trap shet. If you can overtake the cuss in the open and you can use that rifle—yes. But to poke into town and try to git the critter back—well, you might as well try to locate a rich quartz lode in a sheet of Snake River lava."

" Huh ! So you're Old Idaho ? Heard about you up north. You came out to Oregon with the year of 'forty-five immigrants. You was one of the first to prowl around the Boise Basin."

Old Idaho did not relish this. He warmly replied :—

" That's a name some derned fools tucked on to me. My real name's Prescott. I didn't do any prowling round this basin."

Seeing the old man was displeased, Hale maliciously continued :—

" Up in the Cœur d'Alene country they reckon you're the man that found the 'Lost Diggings' in 'forty-five."

" Tarnation ile !" passionately cried Old Idaho. " Some joking feller started that mess of talk. I don't know nothing about mining. Don't have to. Don't want to. I make money raising vegetables. With flour a dollar a pound in Idaho City this last spring—and causing a mob to fire the town—I reckon my lost diggings is right here. There ain't no 'Lost Diggings.' Never was."

" Oh, it's no disgrace to you even if you did prospect a bit. No need of having a fit over it. I was just saying what folks up north are saying."

" They ain't no call to hitch my name to any 'Lost Diggings,'" grunted Old Idaho. " Your mare's in Boise City if they ain't run her down to the Owyhee and sold her."

"And I'd better be hurrying along, eh? You're a hospitable old cuss. Bet you make friends with every starving man you see."

The old man's irritation vanished.

"I hail from New England, where they're just as free with grub as they be anywhere in the world. My heart's all right; but I have my troubles. I have to size folks up before asking 'em to light and squat. Got a granddarter living with me. Too many rough-looking men round these parts for me to be promiscus with free grub. Most of 'em are all right, but you can't tell when the wrong one will come along. Three different times some fellers from Buena Vista Bar come snooping down here this spring, and I had to throw some lead from my old gun before they'd take the hint and dust out. But I reckon you're all right. You're after a stolen mare. You ain't got any time to stop and visit. Come in and eat. What be you called?"

"Hale. Maybe I'd best be moving on."

"Not Shoshoni Hale?" eagerly asked Old Idaho.

"I've been called that up north. Fool notion of fool people."

"I'll use only the last part of your handle, but I always want to admire the Injun part of it. You've got to come in. We'll grub and talk."

Hale, known from Walla Walla to the Beaver Head country as "Shoshoni Hale" because of his reputed influence among the Indians of that tribe, could have explained that he already had eaten, but the glimpse of a face at the window aroused his curiosity; and he followed his eccentric host into the cabin.

As he halted inside the door a slim young fellow in buckskin trousers and flannel shirt advanced to meet him. While he was glancing about to behold the granddaughter Old Idaho was saying:—

"This is my granddarter, Harry Idaho."

"Harriet Prescott," she quickly corrected.

And Hale knew that a glance at the small beaded moccasins should have proclaimed her sex. She took his hand, retained it while she scrutinised him searchingly. He was embarrassed by the intensity of her gaze and considerably abashed by the continued presence of the small hand in his big palm. It was almost as if she hoped to find in him some one she had been looking for. He felt relieved when she withdrew her hand. He was nonplussed when she gravely announced:—

"I reckon you're all right."

"I hope so, miss," he meekly replied.

"But why do you pack two revolvers and that rifle? When I sized you up from the window I reckoned you was one of Jem Helm's gang. While you was talking with granddaddy I had you covered." She jerked her head toward a muzzle-loading rifle leaning against the wall by the window. "My goodness, but that's a mighty fine looking rifle!" she exclaimed as she studied the Henry.

"Regular humdinger," he awkwardly assured. "See how she works." He manipulated the mechanism for her edification. "Land sakes!" she cried. "It's worth a dozen of those old muzzle loaders. I tried to get granddaddy to buy me a Spencer."

"Too heavy calibre for a gal," mumbled Old Idaho. "Has to be cocked by hand. Don't have enough power. Sometime I'll git you a Sharps."

"That's a good buffalo gun," said Hale. "It shoots well. But it's a breach-loader, and if the action gits loose you'll git a burst of flame in your face from the powder gas every time you fire it. When I git through with my business on Boise River I'll see if I can't pick you up a Henry, miss."

"Oh, will you?" she cried, clapping her hands like a child when promised a toy. "Granddaddy will pay

you what you pay, and something besides for your trouble."

"I didn't mean it that way, miss," sheepishly explained Hale. "I wanted to fetch it as a present."

"No you won't," broke in Old Idaho. "I've planned to buy her one in Idaho City." Then sternly to the girl, "No presents from strangers, Harry. That's settled."

"It doesn't matter so long as you git what you want," said Hale. He unfastened his belt and shoulder strap and deposited his weapons and blanket in a corner. "You like guns?"

"It's guns, or nothing," she moodily replied. "And I thought you must be one of Helm's gang when I saw you with the hand guns and rifle."

"Man I'm trailing may be one of the gang. Stole my mare. How old are you?" He spoke in jerks, as he was unaccustomed to talking to young women.

"Twenty."

"You don't look it," Her face expressed displeasure. He quickly added, "It's the rig you're wearing. You'd look bigger in petticoats."

"My goodness! Is that so?" she cried in mock amazement. "Well, if size shows age you must be older than the Salmon River Mountains."

"Harry, behave yourself," commanded Old Idaho. "Shoshoni Hale can make the Injuns fetch and carry for him like so many tame dogs. He's probably got some of 'em waiting for him near here."

"Nonsense," growled Hale, feeling confused. "That is, I have a friend, a Shoshoni, camping four or five miles north of here, waiting for me to come back after I git my mare."

"Didn't I say so?" triumphed the old man.

"So that's who you are? Shoshoni Hale," purred

the girl, and studying him with lively interest. " You must have lots of influence over them."

" I've got a few friends among 'em," he mumbled. " Lots of white men have found Indians make true-blue friends. But I ain't much account when it comes to talking with a young woman, miss. I reckon I'll be going, or they'll have that mare way down in Chico."

" Get down to the table and I'll set on the breakfast," she briskly commanded. Hale slid meekly on to a stool and found that when seated his head was level with hers. This added to his confusion.

" So they stole your mare," rattled on the girl, pausing half-way between the table and the cook-room. " Well, seeing that you are you, perhaps they won't eat you up. Why didn't you fetch along your Indian to help get the mare back ? "

" You're mistook, miss," timidly explained Hale. " That Indian talk is mostly foolishness. I can't bring Black Cloud into it. White men don't think much of killing an Indian. Up in the mountains it would be different. I let him pick up the trail, but once I see it was making for a town I had him stay behind. If I could jump the critter outside of the town I wouldn't ask for any help except from my rifle."

" If I had a rifle like that I'd ride through Idaho City and nary a man would make eyes at me—less I wished him to."

With this pert remark she disappeared. Old Idaho took the head of the table and furtively studied the bowed head of his guest. The face, he decided, was too long to be attractive. The eyes had a trick of remaining half-closed, and their colour reminded him of the grayish-green sage. The girl returned with a platter heaped with meat and dumplings, and a pot of coffee. Hale lifted his head and eyed the dumplings wolfishly.

It had been several months since he had eaten bread, the nearest approach to it beinghardtack.

After he had helped himself the girl remarked :—

“ So you’re going after the mare ? Why don’t you tell the Payette Committee about it ? They’ve done lots of good in getting stolen property back. If they’d had Ben Riply over at Idaho City when it was burned this spring the thieves wouldn’t have lugged so many store goods into the hills.”

“ I don’t belong down here. I can’t ask favours of strangers. I pack my own blankets and run my own trails. If I can’t get the mare back after locating her the thief is welcome to her.”

“ You seem to be awfully cock-sure of yourself, Shoshoni Hale.” She spoke as one overawed, but he knew she was making game of him and his face coloured. He was ill at ease under her solemn eyes. He feared for what her artless bluntness would incite her to say. Entirely unaccustomed to women’s company he felt he was trapped and helpless. The old man perceived his growing embarrassment and tersely commanded :

“ Harry, keep your trap shet ! ”

“ Oh, I don’t mind ! ” protested Hale, mopping his long face. Then he humbly explained to her, “ Being a stranger, it don’t strike me as proper to go round begging for help. Up north I might feel more free to call on.”

“ And you might not,” she soothingly added. “ You might just trust to your hand guns and rifle. You look like that.”

This time he flushed with happiness. It was a wonderful experience to have a young woman, as tantalisingly pretty as the girl was, give him praise. He found himself saying :

“ It was only a notion my coming down here, anyway.”

After he had spoken he decided it sounded idiotic. He discovered that Old Idaho was grinning in his beard.

For several minutes they were too busy eating to talk. The girl was taking time to perfect her estimate of the stranger. All tongues did not agree as to the kind of man Shoshoni Hale was. He had been active in building the Mullan wagon road from Walla Walla to Fort Benton, and was credited with having a more extensive knowledge of the country between the upper Missouri and the Cascade Mountains than he was entitled to. But there is no pleasure in adhering to facts when gossiping about a man.

It is very probable that his friendship with certain leaders among the Shoshoni was construed to mean that he knew the country as well as they did. As a fact he was sufficiently familiar with all the country forming Idaho Territory and western Montana, northern Utah, and parts of Washington and Oregon to serve as guide to the majority of newcomers to this, the latest El Dorado.

To say he knew the country as well as the Indian he had left north of the Payette was nonsense. But his reputation as a trail maker alone would not have made his name conspicuous among the miners in the Snake River Basin. Something else was needed to keep his name alive at camp-fires and in the saloons on the Boise, the Clearwater, and the creek tributaries of the Snake and Owyhee.

There was a mystery about the fellow ; therein was found the stimulus. He dressed like a mountain man of the old beaver régime. No one seemed to know where he had been, or what he had done since quitting road building in 'sixty-two. Not that he had vanished during these three years, for such a prolonged absence would have spelled oblivion. He had come and gone, flitting in and off the scene. But he was never known

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to prospect for lode or placer ; and yet he always had his bag of dust.

It was an easily accepted truism that an able-bodied man in Idaho Territory must be engaged in mining, ranching, farming, transportation, merchandising, selling rum, or gambling, or else he must have a much less wholesome occupation. More from a love of exaggeration and the human desire to increase the mystery than because of any adequate proof it came to be whispered by some—some who had never seen him—that he painted his face and did gruesome work while thus disguised.

This poisonous uncertainty about the man persisted, although no proof involving him with law breaking had been unearthed out of all the too few examples made of outlawry by the Payette Committee and other extemporeaneous tribunals.

Yet surely was a man to be eyed askance who had no vocational background ? No one had produced any evidence connecting Hale with the banditti, but his detractors said this evidenced his great cunning. It was too well known that Indians, as well as white men disguised as Indians, were preying on the stage lines, on freight and pack-trains, and on lonely horse ranchos.

Old Idaho was busy mulling over some of these bits of gossip as he ate his breakfast.

The story of the stolen mare now began to worry the old man. True, he had seen a mare, conspicuously marked as Hale had described. But suppose a man planned a coup against property, and suppose that man realised there were those who suspected him of being on the wrong side of the law ; what better rôle of innocence, then, to adopt when venturing into the Payette Valley than to come as one who had been plundered ? How easily and quickly could he establish himself as an injured man by having an accomplice

precede him with the alleged stolen property so marked as to be noted and remembered? Being a vegetable farmer, Old Idaho should not have feared even a robber. Perhaps the trim little figure of his granddaughter was the treasure he wished no lawless man to discover.

Age weighs and deliberates long after Youth has leaped to a conclusion. The girl was immensely pleased to have met this stranger. Infrequently other men wandered down the valley and called at the cabin. Among these were some with the eyes of a mountain-wolf as they gazed on the girl. Old Idaho brusquely sent all such about their business. As yet none had dared, or cared, to disregard his orders.

Yet it was a lonely life for a girl of twenty. Day after day the wonderful blue mountain tops hung in the heavens at dawn; shadow succeeding glare at evening, with a purple sea covering the plains. At dawn and dusk mountains appeared and grew immeasurably in height and flung out far reaching ridges, yet hid themselves at noon-time. And there was the glory of the nights, when the rapid radiation brought coolness, even a chill, when the heavens were crowded with stars and each star burned like a planet.

She accepted these wonders just as she accepted the summer winds from the west, heavy with dust, and blowing with a steady persistency throughout the afternoon and dying mysteriously at sunset. Out of all these phenomena she made many stories and peopled the heavens and the haze with her day-dreams. But she was young and full-blooded and her spirit clamoured for something which neither the marvels of the zenith, nor the beauties of earth could supply.

She had a horse to ride, if she would promise not to go too far. She had guns to shoot, but was not permitted to venture widely and depend upon them.

And there was a time for a brief spell when she had had a dog to love. With the dog came her first touch of romance.

The dog was a gift from a man in Idaho City. His hands were better kept than those of any other man she had ever seen. She met him on one of the rare occasions when her grandfather took her to the county seat. He was very picturesque, a bit melodramatic, in his black jacket, snowy shirt, his brown trousers tucked into irreproachable French patent-leather boots. His hair was glossy and his beard short and distinguished looking. And he removed his black felt hat when addressing her with a mixture of impudence and meekness.

He told her his name was Ferdinand Patterson, and that he had never met a woman to notice her until he met her. Then he gave her the dog and she had brought it home, and with her mind filled with romantic nonsense. Soon after he invited himself to the cabin and ate with them. She had been highly elated at this break in the sage-brush monotony. Then her grandfather walked aside with the man and talked to him briefly. He rode away without even saying good-bye. The next day Old Idaho found the dog shot through the heart, and the old man buried it and said it had gone back to town. The gambler had taken back his gift.

Thus with her sentimental background but hastily sketched in with emotions which she could not analyse, the girl was in love with love without knowing it. She was as frank and honest in her desire to discover and understand her strange impulses as she was unconscious of her masculine garb. Life to her was always on the edge of becoming a wonderful and beautiful adventure. As she watched Hale she vaguely began to understand that the adventure could not begin until there came

a man who was not old like her granddaddy, nor wicked as she believed all gamblers to be, nor animals as were some of the bewhiskered creatures who happened upon the cabin.

She tilted her head and surveyed Shoshoni Hale with marked deliberation. Hale was eating heartily although it was his second breakfast. He grew flustered when he became aware of the girl's fixed gaze, and refused to take the dumpling he had reached for. He ceased eating when she peremptorily demanded :—

“ Where did you come from anyway ? ”

“ Lewiston and Oro Fino.”

“ I mean your home. Where was your home when you was a boy ? ”

“ I never had a home,” he slowly told her, and gravely returned her level gaze. “ I was a baby when my mother died, so I do not remember her. It was back east. My father brought me west. Wagon trains. Sickness. Starvation. Bloodshed. Then a brief time of plenty to eat. I never had the chance to be a boy.”

“ Your father is dead ? ”

He nodded and rose from the table and picked his belt from the corner. Facing about he said in a colourless voice :—

“ Yes, my father's dead. Dead these six years.”

His recital was terse and lacking all details, yet it painted for her a picture she could visualise. She understood wagon trains, sickness and famine ; yes, and even bloodshed. Although sheltered from the many grim incidents characterising the main roads of travel, there were times when surging, avaricious, reckless humanity overlapped into the valley and marked its intrusion by untoward acts. Eager to talk further with one who met her on a plane she could understand, and feeling nothing but pity and sympathy for this old-young man, she hurriedly told him :—

"It's much the same with me. Granddaddy and my folks came out in 'forty-five. My father died just before I was born at Umatilla. Poor little mother felt so sad she died when I was a baby. I don't remember her. We came here five years ago. Tell him, granddaddy, how you were up this way when the wagon train went through in 'forty-five, and how you went looking for lost cattle and found—"

"Hold your tongue!" fiercely commanded the old man. "Chatter! Chatter! How many times have I told you— There, there. You're a good girl. Let's say nothing more about it." Then to the astonished Hale he awkwardly explained, "Certain things nerve me up. That trip to Oregon made wounds that don't heal easy-like."

The girl ran into an adjoining room and Hale somehow knew she was hiding tears. He felt very miserable on her account and very angry with the old man. The anger and excitement in Old Idaho's bearing when he checked the girl's innocent impulse smacked of senile madness.

"She must be lonely as hell here," mused Hale aloud.

"She's happy enough when folks from the outside don't come in to put fool notions in her head," mumbled the old man, moving toward the door. "That mare of yours must be in Boise City by this time."

Belting on his guns and securing his rifle and blanket roll, Hale followed his host outside. He looked back for a farewell glimpse of the girl, but she remained unseen. It seemed monstrous that one so sweet and alluring should be reduced to sorrow. It was a man's game to suffer, but this gentle creature was no more intended for sadness than a song-bird for the snare.

Hale suddenly saw his life hard and ugly like a sheet of lava. The girl was the first decorative bit to relieve that ugliness. Her personality filled him with a longing

to know more of that unsuspected plane which her sweet artlessness seemed to type. His scowl was venomous as he magnified the maid's tears into a tragedy. Old Idaho twisted his beard nervously and muttered :—

“ Women always jabber too much.”

Hale gave a short laugh ; more like a bark than anything else. He was starved for a woman's talk and this ancient one was objecting to it. He had just discovered what a bleak, dreary affair his life had been, and the old man had cut short his vision of what might have been.

“ All they think about is keeping their tongues a-wagging,” Old Idaho continued.

“ Old man, I've lived much alone. I've wandered in the mountains and gone a year without seeing any white women. The honest white women I've seen for the last six years I can count on my ten fingers. I didn't get to have a talk with only a few of them. It seems to me that if an ounce of blood could buy a word from the little girl I'd stick around and listen till I was bled white. There's some things so much out of joint that a man don't git riled over 'em. What you say is one of them things.”

“ Well, I don't like chatter,” grumbled Old Idaho. “ And it always raps me for any one to keep harping on them Lost Diggings of 'forty-five.”

“ Men up north of the Clearwater still talk about the 'forty-five immigration and the Lost Diggings,” said Hale, eyeing Old Idaho narrowly. “ Something about a man going to look for cattle and finding gold. The story goes that he found curious-looking rock and brought back specimens to the wagon train along with the cattle, but was too much of a tenderfoot to know he'd been tramping over a fortune. The story has it that he tossed the specimens—some of it almost free

gold—into the tool-box. Some say the train reached Oregon before the man learned it was gold."

"Lies! All a pack of derned lies!" whispered Old Idaho, his beard wagging violently. "Every new country is filled with them kind of lies. Wade and Miner started to find them Lost Diggings two years ago and made the rich strike on Jordan Creek. So if ever there was any Lost Diggings they've been found in the Owyhee country, and the men from Placerville relocated 'em when they pounced down on Discovery Bar."

"Of course," murmured Hale. "Well, I'll be gitting after my mare."

"I'm just a vegetable farmer. Never hankered for digging gold. I ain't no miner," persisted Old Idaho.

"You don't need to tell me that—or anything. Keep the little girl close to home. Now that the Oregon and Washington troops have been mustered out of border service the Indians will be making free of this basin. They've suffered too much not to strike back. And they have horses and guns and ammunition. And they can fight. What's worse than Indians are some of the men from the 'left wing of Price's army' that are wandering up and down the basin."

"I can take care of my own so far as any white scum is consarned, but I can't lick a whole tribe of Injuns. They all oughter be shot."

"They probably will be in time," was the morose rejoinder. "The old treaty of 'fifty-five ain't been lived up to. The new treaty ain't been confirmed by the government. Settlers are living under the terms of the new, and the Indians are clinging to the terms of the old. Eagle-from-the-Light is ready to swap war pipes with the Blackfoot and Crow nations and kill all whites in Idaho and Montana. If the trouble ever gits started you want to clear out of this valley on the

jump. Until it breaks you won't be harmed by Shoshoni or Nez Perces so long as you stick here at home. Look out for white men, who are worse than Indians."

"I know how to handle whites. Run one dandified feller out this early summer, who came down from Idaho City to pester Harry."

"So? What's he called?"

"Patterson. Gambling feller."

"Ferd Patterson? The skunk! I knew of him in Oregon and Washington. Don't warn him off if he comes again. Kill him on sight. He's got a blood record the whole length of the coast. And he's in Idaho City? Can't have been there long."

"Don't know nothing about him 'cept he's a gambling feller. Dresses slick and is just the sort to turn a fool woman's head. I'm shy of my girl meeting any strange men. Reckon there's queer yarns about almost every man one meets out here."

He punctuated the last with a thrusting glance at Hale.

Hale smiled weariedly.

"That's all right," he said. "Be suspicious of me till you learn something about me. I won't even say that I'm half-way decent. But be suspicious of the other fellow, also. Of course the girl must meet men some time and they'll be strangers till she gets to know 'em. It's for you to get acquainted with 'em first. As to talking about me I'll only say this: they don't to my face."

Old Idaho grinned maliciously and replied:—

"They don't talk to Patterson's face, either."

Hale mulled this over for a few moments and then slowly said:—

"Perhaps it would be better if there was more face-to-face talk. I believe I'll start the good example. Yes; I'll make it my business to meet Patterson before

I go back north. I'll meet him in some public place, where there'll be witnesses, and I'll tell him what I know of his record."

"And die in your tracks," Old Idaho jeered.

"I don't think so. But that's a risk a man takes if he tells certain truths out here."

"If you ain't killed by him you'll be killed by some of his pards. He has a gang close at hand all the time. No one will be punished for killing you. There's a lawless set of hellions loose along the Boise and in Idaho City. They need a committee like what we have in the valley here."

"Well, no one has killed me yet. That's a good sign. So long." And making his way down the bank he forded the shallow stream and took up his walk to Boise City.

Old Idaho watched him for a minute, and told himself aloud :

"He may be all and more than what some folks say about him. But, dang it ! he's too well set up a man to be clumping through sage-brush and bunch grass. Hi ! Shoshoni Hale ! Hi ! Hi ! Wait a bit and I'll lend you a hoss."

Hale waved a hand and called back :—

"Thanks. But I'll be outfitted all right once I locate the mare."

CHAPTER II

BOISE CITY JUSTICE

THE prevailing west wind was a blast from a furnace and blew with a monotonous persistency that made Boise City nervous and irritable. From midday until sunset the wind would hold, and the accumulative effect of its daily visitation made disputes a dangerous pastime. In front of the Tusk Saloon the temperature was a hundred and five, but thanks to the dry air, not so unendurable as a lesser degree of heat in a more humid climate. And yet it was hot enough.

A stranger in the town, with his first night before him, would resent the information that night would find him eager for blankets.

The Saw Tooth Mountains were smothered in haze and were to be located by the futile attempts of a thunderstorm to reach the plains. Each day the sullen clouds piled high their resources and with ferocious displays of lightning threatened the sage-brush levels, only to be defeated and dried up by the hot west wind. But each day the line of defeat would lie farther from the base of the serrate range. Not until autumn, however, would the rain conquer and reach the vast plains.

And Boise City was crowded with sweltering humanity. The average citizen's temper, unless restrained, would flash up over trifles. Men came and went and the town was always full. Beginning with early spring, stage-coaches from Placerville and Idaho City, some

thirty-five miles to the north, had been bringing in and hauling away the gold-hungry. The upper country was rushing flood-tide to the Owyhee country along Jordan Creek, breaking the journey at Boise. But the Owyhee country was poorly timbered and entirely unlike the Boise Valley.

The mines were far up in the mountains and the country was rough and the roads poor. Perhaps one out of a dozen remained after finding the discovery ground was taken up and new diggings hard to find. And northward streamed the disappointed, with Boise again taking toll. The travel over the Blue Mountains from Oregon and up from California and Utah held to a high level.

In one month two thousand wagons arrived from the east to scatter throughout Montana and Idaho, with a goodly percentage reaching Boise. Wagon and pack trains were arriving constantly. Hotels were filled to capacity. The gambling-resorts and saloons, gay with glass and furnishings, packed in from Portland at twenty-nine cents a pound, ran day and night to satisfy the excitement seekers. Possibly the majority of the adventurers were from the Coast, and already had grooved their minds to liberal ideas regarding pleasure.

And there were many men of evil there. Desperadoes flocked in from east of the Missouri, from Montana, from the Salmon and Payette Valleys to form a partnership in crime with men fresh from making the bloody history of the Coast. This miscellaneous riff-raff not only leavened the honest citizenry, but also managed to have things much its own way. Organised and unorganised villainy resulted in chaos. It was well-nigh impossible to convict of murder in the first degree. For two hundred deaths by violence the law hanged five men.

An Owyhee man made his kill and was sentenced

to serve ten years. After two months of retirement he was pardoned on a petition showing that he did not hit the man he shot at, and, therefore, was guiltless of premeditation. This persisting reign of crime was logical enough so long as there were county and territorial officials who stole or squandered the public funds. The basin of the Snake was at the mercy of wrongdoers. Highway robbery, the wholesale looting of wagon trains, raids on horse ranchos, and the counterfeiting of gold dust, were of frequent occurrence.

These crimes were often accompanied by murder. The fact that the unwritten law justified the shooting of a man found seated on a stolen horse did not check the stealing of horses. As if these depredations by lawless whites were not enough for the basin to endure there were the Indians viciously active. The creation of a new military sub-division for Nevada and the Owen's River valley in California was expected to put an end to the red man's raids on the traffic between those regions and Idaho. The efficiency of this protective service was supposed to be doubly ensured when Charles McDermitt, the man who went to the rescue of the immigrants in the Modoc country in 'fifty-two, was named commander. But despite this veteran's efforts the Indians hampered the California road traffic throughout the spring and summer of 'sixty-five. They were bold enough to attack a saddle train on Jordan Creek and a wagon train at Farewell Bend, securing mules in both raids.

Sheriff D. C. Updyke found the social status of Boise City very pleasing as he sat in his office near the Tusk Saloon and listened to the reports of his deputies. A discord was struck when Deputy Gamby reported that a certain rancho keeper, who had been "robbed" by parties unknown of thirty head of horses entrusted to his care by miners, was refusing to split the profits.

"He says he's afraid to make a move till the owners git through hunting for the nags. Says he thinks he's more'n half-suspected. He says that after things have quieted down he'll produce the stock for us to sell."

"He'll turn the hosses over now, or he'll quit keeping a rancho," growled the sheriff. "You take Dollinger and go down there and tell him them's my orders. If he holds back I'll arrest him as hoss thief and hang him."

"If you arrest him he'll tell things. The town will set their vigilant committee to working and some of his blabbing will be believed. Better strike a bargain with Jem Helm. Wash your hands of it and let Jem put it through. Then if there's any blabbing it will be against Helm and his gang."

Updyke snapped his fingers scornfully.

"Send Helm? You're crazy. Chances are Helm put him up to hiding the stock and holding it out on us. Let him talk and be damned. If I arrest him he won't have any time to talk. We'll turn him off ourselves and lay it to the vigilants. No, Gamby; we don't want Jem Helm's fingers in this dish. He'n his gang ain't showing any hankering to work in double-harness with us. Take Dollinger and try soft measures. If they don't work just come back to me for further orders."

Gamby passed out, ill-pleased with his errand. A second deputy approached the sheriff's table and hoarsely whispered:—

"Ben Riply's in town."

Updyke rose from his chair and sat down again.

"That little devil! Why didn't you tell me before?"

"He just come in from up-country."

Updyke scowled heavily. Finally he said:—

"I ain't afraid of that rat. I represent law'n order in Ada County. No outsider can tell me what to do

even if he does talk for the Payette Committee. He ain't on his own stamping ground down here."

"Mebbe he's here to git Boise to start its committee working again."

Updyke pondered over this suggestion for a few moments and did not relish it. He ordered:—

"Find Gamby and tell him his business can wait till I learn what Riply's up to. Swanger, anything new?"

Deputy Swanger lounged forward and announced:—

"'Sydney Bill' brought a mare in and sold her to Ferd Patterson."

The sheriff swore furiously. When he could get back to connected speech he declared:—

"That comes of trusting one of them Australian fellows. He knows our rules; all stock to be turned in. He knew he hadn't any right to sell, even to Patterson. If trouble comes he'll expect us to save his hide. Find out from Patterson what he paid. Tell him I'm asking. I never trusted Bill in money matters."

"Bill 'lows the mare was so marked as to be recognised easy. Told me he thought he'd been trailed and didn't want her on his hands. He says he made the price cheap so Patterson would take her and forget who sold her to him. Of course Patterson understands the risk he's running of losing her if the owner turns up."

"Losing her in Boise City?" jeered Updyke. "You fellows make me tired. What am I sheriff for? Why is Curks the judge? As sheriff I won't let any one take the mare by force. If the matter's carried into court Curks will stand firm for his friends. Patterson played it low down. He knows how the game works and he skinned Bill by playing a low figure. When he done that he was skinning me. If he wants to play any of those games let him do it where he sleeps, in Idaho City. It proves what I've always told the men; let

me do the planning and dickering. Get the price from Patterson, then find Bill and send him up here. He'll be at the Tusk."

At about the time Swanger was locating Sydney Bill—so called because he had been a leader of Sydney Town in San Francisco, and an Australian convict before that—Shoshoni Hale came down the main street of the town, his grayish-green eyes roaming from side to side in search of some trace of his property.

On the outskirts of the town he had inspected several small horse corrals and had satisfied himself the mare was either in the town or on the road to Salt Lake City, or California. A group of loafers before a stable raised a laugh at his elkskin trousers and moccasins. This, not that the garb was a rarity, but because of a vicious desire to deride and pick a quarrel.

Not heeding them, he plodded up the street until arriving at the Tusk. Here he halted and mopped his dripping face and curiously eyed the nine-foot tusk mounted on a block of white oak. It measured nine inches through at the base and once was worn by some prehistoric monster. It had been found by a prospector on Rabbit Creek, ten miles from the Snake, and labouriously brought to town to serve as a sign for the saloon and gambling hell.

The Tusk was a long structure with a bar along one wall and the floor given over to gaming tables. Men were pouring in to cool their blood with fiery potations. Men were emerging, too stupid to find a bit of shade.

Hale brushed back his long hair and entered. The bar was well-filled, with a drunken miner the centre of attraction. This fellow, dressed in rags, with trousers fashioned from flour bags, with his toes protruding through his broken boots, was spending gold-dust and nuggets with the freedom of a man of millions. Those who pressed close about him were looking beyond

the gold he had with him. They were feverish to learn where his diggings were located.

Hale worked his way close to the group and called for whisky. He drank slowly and kept a curious eye on the drunken miner and men fencing him in to the bar.

" You don't know where you got it," taunted one man.

" I don't, huh ? " mocked the miner. " See green in my eye ? Think I'm drunk, don't ye ? Wal, I be. An' I know where there's enough of this yaller dirt to keep me drunk for a million years. *Yee-ouw-w!* Every one take a touch of p'izen on 'Lucky Tom' of Lost Gulch. Huh ? Where's Lost Gulch ? Where I git the dust, you fool."

Significant looks were exchanged. A whisper ran from the bar around behind the miner to the bar again. Then one of the men declared :—

" You're a stranger to us. You're spending your dust right handsome. It does you proud. But how do we know it ain't counterfeit, just zinc and copper ? They've been hanging folks around here on just a suspicion of counterfeiting dust. You ain't known round here except by a few. You come in and tell yarns about striking a bonanza. There'll be some ugly talk, then some one will act rash, and you'll be through with drinking and your Lost Gulch. Now you know we're your friends, Tom. Tell us where you made your strike. Or go and file on your discovery claim ; then no one can jump it. You know the law allows you to hold one creek, one bar, and one hill claim. But if you don't file you'll wind up by holding nothing."

" You talk like you was drunk," answered the miner, and he smiled broadly. " Never entered your noodle that an assayer can soon tell you if my dust is the real article or not, huh ? Or did you folks think I was so

drunk I wouldn't think of it? First, I'm going to swing for counterfeiting dust; next I'm going to have my claim jumped if I don't file and let the whole basin know where it is.

"Mister, that placer belongs to me. Men up in Oro Fino are making fifty dollars a day pounding up rock in a common hand mortar. But I can take out five hundred dollars a day and keep it up for years. There's bushels of it in the gravel beds of Lost Gulch. That's my name for it—just Lost Gulch. Counterfeit dust, huh? How about this. Just tickle your peepers with this."

He slammed down on the bar a piece of ore that resembled lead, a chloride of silver impregnated with gold and worth four dollars an ounce as taken from the mine, and so soft as to be cut with a knife.

"Any counterfeit about that, huh?"

"Ruby silver, by gosh!" some one gasped.

The half-circle seemed to shiver. Eyes that burned with murder were focused on the ragged fellow. There were men at the bar who would gladly have cut his throat for an ounce of dust, and if his boasting was half true he possessed the secret to millions. The spokesman for the group breathed deep and fast as if exhausted by fast running. When he could control his voice he signalled for the others to remain quiescent and pushed the bottle before Lucky Tom and in a jovial voice cried:—

"Good luck to you, my boy. I hope you've got tons of it. Hope you live a million years to enjoy it. Drink up on a poor devil who hasn't any bonanza behind him."

The miner chuckled sardonically and flipped a nugget across the bar and said:—

"We'll drink, but I'll do the buying. No use for me to cart any of this stuff back with me."

Before any reply could be made a sturdily built fellow with a polished bald head leaped up from a small table, his cards still grasped in his hand, and buffeted his way through to the miner's side and demanded :—

"Where's the gulch you're yelping about? Spit it out! You men are too soft and polite. His secret belongs to all of us. Curse me if I'll drag along when I see a man who's found enough gold to make us all rich! Now, you big fool, where's those diggings located? You don't hog them any longer."

And, still gripping the cards, the gambler drew a dragoon pistol, sawed off short, and held it under the miner's nose.

"I'm desperate! I'll stand no holding back. You spit it out, or off goes the top of your head. The game's big enough for me to risk anything on it. The percentage makes me sit in. Come. I'm waiting."

The group remained silent, no one interfering. Shoshoni Hale reached a long arm over a man's shoulder and tapped the gambler on the head with his open hand.

"Easy there, stranger," he gently warned. "If that pistol should go off by mistake your head would follow his at once."

Without removing his gaze from the miner the gambler quietly asked :—

"Has he got me covered?"

"No gun in sight but he looks like he'd draw right smart."

"All right," calmly observed the gambler, and, lowering his weapon, he backed to a clear space in the floor.

The miner faced about and rested his elbows on the edge of the bar and grinned delightedly at the discomfited gambler. Without glancing at Hale he said :—

"Much obliged, neighbour; but now I'll take the ribbons. I ain't so drunk but what I can take care of

all the trouble that comes head-on. You boys scatter to one side so's I can size up this critter that tries to sink a shaft in my private affairs."

The crowd quickly melted away. Hale gave the miner a sharp glance and decided he was able to look after his own business. With a gesture to indicate he was through with the situation he moved down the bar. For nearly a minute the gambler stood with his pistol dangling from his right hand, the left hand still clinging to the cards, his bald head thrust forward like a vulture's. Lucky Tom, still leaning against the bar with his hands hanging loosely before his deep chest, found the situation amusing, and he began to laugh loudly.

The gambler slowly announced :—

"I will now teach you to laugh at me." With that he threw up the pistol and at the same moment the miner's hand flashed from the bosom of his shirt, and the two explosions almost came as one. The pistol ball grazed the miner's neck and smashed a bottle of whisky on the back bar. The lead from the revolver drilled through the polished bald head and the gambler went down on his face.

Instantly Hale had the miner by the shoulder and was pulling him toward the door and whispering in his ear :—

"Git out of town! I'll swear it was self-defence. But git out now."

He fairly hurled him the remaining distance to the door. Lucky Tom gave him one look of thanks and fled. The room was a pandemonium for a minute. Many of the patrons had crawled under the tables, or behind the bar, or had bolted to the street in anticipation of further shooting. That a man who had appeared to be so helplessly drunk should be so capable of defending himself left the remaining spectators stupefied.

Hale was the first to advance and kneel by the

gambler's side. Glancing up after a brief examination he said :—

“ He's dead. The other fellow shot in self-defence.”

The side door opened to admit a man wearing a black jacket and brown trousers and high patent leather boots. He walked to the dead man, explaining :—

“ Heard on the street some one had been bored. What ! Old Hawk ! ”

And he knelt beside the corpse and turned it over and rested a hand on the silent breast. Hale marvelled at the symmetry and flexibility of the smooth hand.

“ Old Hawk is sure dead,” he muttered.

Then he sought to remove the cards from the clenched left hand and found the death clutch defied him. He curiously read the cards and with a grunt of disgust rose and brushed the dust from his knees and exclaimed :—

“ How could he expect to win with a rotten hand like that ? Bury the cards with him, boys. Send me the bill. He meant well but he overplayed. Where's the man who shot him ? ”

A chorus of disjointed exclamations answered him, and it was half a minute before he learned just what had happened. The story of the dust and the ruby silver brought no change to the man's face, but when cries of “ String him up ! ” began to fill the room he loudly called :—

“ None of that ! The dead man was my friend, but he was shot in a fair fight. He never should have toted that cursed pistol with its stubby barrel. We'll have an inquiry, but no hanging. Some of you find the fellow and tell him he won't be harmed if he comes back peaceably.”

Hale had had enough of the place. He worked his way through the crowd and reached the street and took shelter from the sun in the shade of a warehouse.

The novelty of reading a newspaper appealed to him and he paid a dollar to a boy for a copy of the *Idaho Statesman*, a tri-weekly, and found it filled with mining news. He read how the Landon lode, consolidated with the Pioneer, was yielding twenty-three dollars for every hundred pounds. The Ada Elmore, near the head of Bear creek, the first and most famous of the South Boise quartz mines but grossly mismanaged by speculating trustees, was claiming to yield two hundred and seventy dollars gold for each ton of rock and was asking for capital to repair the deliberate mischief worked by the speculators.

He learned that thousands of tons of ore were being shipped to San Francisco and New York to attract capitalists. Hill Beachy feared he must close his stage road to Star City, Nevada, and California because of the hostile Indians. The Oregon Steam Navigation Company announced its plans for navigating the Snake as far as Salom Falls with a big steamboat. The stock of the Humboldt express company had been run off by Indians, and a stable-keeper had been killed within forty miles of Jordan Creek.

Woolen socks were a drug on the market and the only commodity not bringing exorbitant prices. Readers of the paper were urged to use them for cleaning guns. Carefully folding the paper, he thrust it inside his shirt for further perusal and strolled down the street. He asked no aid in locating the mare. Perhaps he was so used to doing things for himself that the thought never occurred to him.

A derisive voice yelled something and he swung his head to find himself once more passing the loungers who had jeered him on his first appearance in the street. The fact that the wooden building was a stable suddenly decided him to inspect it. As he turned toward the entrance, the idlers discovered he was carrying

two guns besides the Henry rifle. They became silent but eyed him sullenly. He halted and soberly appraised them and then entered the building. A weasel of a man with crafty visage glided in front of him to block his advance and asked :—

“ Looking for somebody ? He ain’t here.”

This evoked a laugh from the men at the door.

Hale brushed him aside, and continued toward the rear of the stable. The man followed and demanded :—

“ I asked you if you was looking for somebody.”

“ Why, something like that,” was the slow reply, and Hale halted and began studying the different stalls.

“ Who might you be, little feller ? ”

“ I might be a big lummox, blundering in where I had no business. But it happens that I run this stable. My name is Kolb. Now what do you want here ? Looking for free quarters to git sober in ? ”

Hale’s thrusting glance came to a halt on a box stall at the rear of the stable. The door was closed and the shadows in the corner had made it easy for him to miss it in his first sweeping inventory.

“ I’d think it would be hot for a critter inside that contraption,” he said in a loud voice.

As if the occupant of the stall wished to endorse the remark there came the thudding of hoofs and a low squeal. Hale leaned his rifle against a hay mow and hooked his thumbs in his belt and faced the open door. Kolb observed that he was smiling, and yet there was something in the half-closed eyes that cancelled any suggestion of merriment.

“ We don’t like to have strangers around here unless they have business,” brusquely informed Kolb.

“ That’s a mighty good rule,” agreed Hale, and nodded his head vigorously. “ A mighty good rule. You ought to live up to it all the time.”

The men at the door began sidling inside. Each time

Hale spoke the hoofs in the stall became more clamorous. Hale put two fingers to his lips and sounded a shrill whistle. Immediately he was answered by a shrill squealing and a violent tattoo against the door.

"Git out of here! You're skeering my stock! Git out!" yelled Kolb, brandishing his arms wildly.

The loungers noiselessly pressed forward. With a flirt of his hands Hale drew his guns and held them half-raised and appeared to be contemplating them admiringly. He explained, "You fellers understand that these are .36s and not them measly .31s that strangers from the east fetch in here."

"What do you mean by coming in here and drawing guns?" cried Kolb as he backed away. "Think you can scare me or my friends with your threats?"

"Threats? Scare you?" blankly repeated Hale. "Lordy sakes! I was just saying that these are .36 calibre guns. When you buy a gun git this kind. Don't fuss with the .31s. I see one of your friends favours the new navy .44, only he hasn't got it slung on right. They're sure powerful. But I've tried all makes, and for blowing a hole through a horse thief, or stopping a road-agent, there's nothing so neat and businesslike as the .36. And don't buy the paper cartridges. They ain't waterproof. This country's dry but you never know when you're going to fall into a crick. Buy these and run your own bullets." And he tapped the metal flask with its small measuring stopper and the set of moulds hitched to his sagging belt. "Now I'll git my mare, and I'll be needing a heap of room."

The men remained stationary as Hale slowly backed toward the stall. Kolb began to curse loudly. Some one at the door yelled:—

"Wait a minute, stranger! I'm an officer of the law. Move another step at your peril."

Hale replaced his guns and replied :—

“ Folks didn’t ought to stand in peril of their lives from an officer of the law.”

“ I’m mighty glad you’ve come, Deputy Sheriff Swanger ! ” greeted Kolb. “ This man acts like he was crazy. Sun or whisky, I reckon.”

With brisk step the deputy-sheriff advanced toward Hale, a finger touching the badge on his woollen shirt. Hale quietly explained :—

“ I’m from up Oro Fino way. Been trailing my stolen mare. She’s in that box stall.”

“ The sun or whisky has melted his few brains into fat ! ” cried Kolb. “ That door ain’t been opened to-day.”

“ If that’s true then you’re worse than a sneaking little rat. You’re plumb bad,” gritted Hale. “ To keep a critter boxed up like that in weather like this ! ” To the deputy, “ She’s all black, smooth as satin, with a white star on her right hind quarter. Her name is Pinaquana.” A terrific kicking greeted the name. Hale smiled and continued: “ It means in Shoshoni, ‘ A smell of sugar,’ she being fond of sweets.” There came more squealing from the stall and a continuation of the tattoo on the door. “ I want to be legal, but I’m in a hurry to give her some fresh air. Go ahead and open the door. Hi, girl ! Just a minute, Pinaquana ! ”

For the next thirty seconds it seemed as if the mare would batter down the door and effect her own release. She only desisted when Hale called out for her to be quiet. Swanger glanced up and down the tall figure and disapproved of the heavy belt-guns. He had come from the Tusk after sending Sydney Bill to the sheriff. On passing the stable one of the loungers had informed him of what was going on inside. But the stranger was not the type he had expected to find. An immigrant,

or a farmer, would have been quickly sent to the right about. A truculent miner would require rough handling but would have been easily disposed of. But this fellow impressed the deputy as being very simple, or very deadly. The half-closed eyes gave the lean visage a sleepy, feline expression. The eight-inch guns seemed to go with the tall figure.

"Now see here! This won't do at all," Swanger sharply began. "The animal in the stall is making a racket because it's thirsty. If you think it's your property——"

"Think? I know."

"Then you'll lose nothing by going about it in a legal way. You must git a search warrant and have it served. That'll make it right and reg'lar and give you a chance to prove property."

"Waste time getting a paper when my mare's calling for me to take her out of the damn coffin?" exploded Hale. "Me run after a paper when all I have to do is to open the door and fetch her out?"

"You're a stranger here. There's been too much law-breaking round these parts. You can't walk into a stable and take a horse without showing your right. Everything's going to be reg'lar. There ain't anything to show that you've lost any horseflesh."

From an inside pocket Hale produced a writing and held it for Swanger to read. It was signed by Hill Beachy, pioneer in developing the territory's transportation lines, and a man of great influence. The paper stated that the bearer, Clavin Hale, had lost through theft a black mare marked with a white star on the right hind quarter, that the signer knew the mare belonged to Hale, that she would come at his call and do various tricks at his command, and that she answered to the name of "Pinaquana." Swanger's face lengthened. It was rumoured that Beachy, weary of the continual

theft of his horses and mules, had organised a vigilance committee among his employees and that the ferreting out of horse-thieves would soon be the stage-line's chief occupation from Idaho City to California.

"How do we know you're Hale? You might have found this paper," said the deputy.

"The mare identifies me as Calvin Hale. Beachy identifies Calvin Hale as the owner of the mare. It's simple and sure."

"But it ain't reg'lar," protested Swanger, "I reckon we'd best go to the office."

"And find some other critter in that stall when we come back," said Hale. "I'm afraid I shan't have time to go to your office unless I ride there on the mare. I want to be legal, but life's too short to fuss around too long with you folks."

"That ain't no way to talk to the law," ominously warned Swanger. "You blow in here from nowhere——"

"From Oro Fino," corrected Hale.

"And claim a mare in Kolb's stable. You fetch a paper that any one could fetch if they found it——"

"But there ain't no one else on earth that can make that mare do tricks and come at his call excepting me. Hi, Pinaquana, sing for me."

Much neighing and squealing emanated from the stall until Hale commanded :—

"That'll do."

Whereat the mare became silent. To the deputy Hale said :—

"Any of you gents git her to do that and you can keep her without a word from me."

The deputy sheriff was nonplussed, yet desperate. He heartily wished that Updyke was handling the case. He wished himself out of it and yet did not care to let the stranger get the best of it. The impasse might have led to an open break, with Hale attempting to

rescue his pet by gun-play, if not for the arrival of another man. He advanced to within a few feet of Hale and the officer. Hale recognised him as the man with the smooth hands who had assumed the funeral expenses attending the burial of the dead gambler in the Tusk Saloon. His black soft hat and snowy shirt, the flowing bow tie and shiny leather boots made him a dandy. Ignoring Hale he said to Swanger :—

“ What’s this I hear on the street about some one claiming my mare ? ”

Swanger was much relieved. He nodded toward Hale and explained :—

“ Mister Patterson, we don’t want any trouble here. I know you feel riled, but the law can straighten it out. This man says the animal in that stall is his.”

Patterson swung about and stared insolently at Hale and remarked :—

“ You seem fresh from the wild mountains, stranger.”

The loungers snickered in huge enjoyment.

Hale studied the gambler thoughtfully ; his interest quickened.

“ Is your name Ferdinand Patterson ? ” he asked.

The gambler nodded, a slight smile of amusement curving his lips.

Hale’s face crinkled into a broad grin, and he heartily exclaimed :—

“ Then you’re just the feller I want to see.”

“ Suppose we settle this matter about my mare before we get better acquainted,” suggested Patterson, still smiling, but with the glare of a killer in his gaze.

“ I feel acquainted already,” replied Hale. “ You’re Texas raised.”

Patterson’s eyes narrowed and his smile became a snarl.

“ I just knew there couldn’t be two by the same name,” rejoiced Hale. “ Know you ? Why, I know

you like a book, from cover to cover. You went to California in 1850. You got into a fight in Yreka in 'fifty-six and was shot."

"What the devil you driving at?" whispered Patterson, his pallid face growing hard and tense.

In a voice that sounded rollicking Hale ran on:—

"And you had a fight in Sailor Diggings in 'fifty-nine and had to git out."

"Curse your gall! Who are you?" demanded the gambler.

"I'm the man from the wild mountains you was speaking about. I'm glad to meet up with you. You've had lots of street fighting since the Sailor Diggings affair, and you don't git hurt like you used to. T'other feller gits hurt now. You killed Staples in Portland——"

"Help! This man's trying to kill me! I'm afraid of him!" loudly yelled the gambler, and at the same time pulling a derringer from his coat pocket.

Before he could do more than raise it the muzzle of the heavy Colt was resting against the spotless shirt front.

"If you could shoot first—which you can't—and if that trinket could send a bullet through my heart, I'd still smash a hole through you with this old .36," murmured Hale. "That toy would look better back in your pocket, wouldn't it? There! You've got some sense, even if you are a skunk. I promised a certain party up in the Payette Valley that I'd look you up and in a public place, talking face to face just like this, call off some of your rotten record to you. Now I've done it. I'll just add that you've committed more'n one murder, that you're a low-down coward, and never kill unless you can catch your man off his guard.

"If you ever go down the Payette Valley, where

once you shot a dog, I'm going to git you. Yes, siree ! I surely will plant you beside that poor dog. Now we've settled that much I'm going to put up my gun and any time you hanker to draw on me we'll race for it even Stephen. What say ? "

" You're either drunk or crazy," was the gambler's husky reply.

" Not drunk. Crazy ? Maybe. Now we come back to the mare. How do you happen to claim her ? "

" I bought her."

" Then you bought her of a thief. Show him to me and I'll give you what you paid him for her."

" Thanks. But I prefer the mare. I don't know the man I bought of. He looked honest."

The last brought a chuckle from Hale. Suddenly becoming grave, he said :—

" Patterson, you claim the mare. Then you have a legal right to open up that stall. Do it ! "

For a fraction of a minute the gambler stood motionless, glaring into the grayish-green eyes. Then he wheeled and walked to the stall and threw open the door. Like a black streak the mare sprang into the stable floor and rested her velvet muzzle on Hale's shoulder.

" Easy, old girl," he softly whispered. " Don't stand so I can't see our loving friends."

Swanger was much wrought up. He was angry with Patterson for not drawing quicker and for not shooting once he had drawn. The loud call for help would have been a perfect alibi when testified to before Judge Curks. But he should have shot first and shouted afterward. To permit Hale to ride the mare away would be a blow to Updyke's influence over his rough following. The deputy realised a stage had been reached when it would be poor policy for the sheriff to mix openly in the dispute. The responsibility must

be shunted to other shoulders. He loudly proclaimed to the loungers :—

" I swear you men in as special deputies to help me enforce the law. Kolb, hitch that mare in an open stall and give her water. Mister Patterson, you and this mountain feller will go before Judge Curks and make your claims. If either of you offers any resistance you'll be shot."

Hale's tanned face remained as impassive as an Indian's, although he was beginning to understand that so far as the sheriff was concerned he stood a small chance of recovering his property unless he resorted to gun play. But there was every chance the court would instantly detect the soundness of his claim, and he told himself he would exhaust all peaceable means before resorting to violence and exiling himself from the territory. He knew he would finally get the mare, or be killed in trying. In a low voice he said :—

" I'm a law-abiding man. I respect the law—when she's working. We'll go to court and see how it pans out. Good-bye, girl. I'll be back for you."

With a parting caress he picked up his rifle and walked beside Patterson into the street.

The building used for the court-room was a small structure near the Tusk Saloon. The special deputies solemnly marched on both sides of the two men. The curious and idle fell in behind the little procession, and by the time the court-room was reached there were men enough in attendance to fill it to the door. The majority of the spectators kept up a running fire of derisive remarks directed at Hale. But there were some in the crowd who were grim of purpose although saying nothing.

Judge Curks, said to be the personal friend of Governor Lyon, was summoned from the Tusk. He was cadaverous

of face and gaunt of frame. His rusty black long-skirted coat and his long black hair accentuated the natural pallor of his bony face. There was something mortuary in the whole effect of his presentment. Hale felt dubious as he stared at him.

Curks, seating himself behind a small table, stared indifferently at Hale. As he looked, however, his indifference was pricked through with curiosity, and he frowned slightly. Swanger briefly explained the nature of the dispute, in which much doubt was indirectly cast on Hale's veracity and no mention was made of Patterson's abortive attempt at murder. Hale smiled grimly as he perceived how openly the machinery of the law was moving against him.

"Well, sir!" snapped the court, and addressing Hale, "what have you to say about this display of mortal weapons?"

"I reckon, judge, we're here to talk about my mare," drawled Hale. "I ain't heard that any one has made a complaint about my weapons. Seems to me that the nub of this hearing is the mare. She's down in that rat's stable." And he pointed at Kolb. "And I want her now."

"You deny threatening our citizen's lives with deadly fire-arms?"

"What's the use of my answering that? They can lie faster'n a dozen honest men can tell the truth. That gambling person drew a derringer on me and I had to stick the business end of my gun against his white shirt to make him behave. Now let's talk about my mare."

"You are fined fifty dollars for aiming a lethal weapon at Mr. Patterson."

Hale swallowed convulsively. Those near him observed the big veins swelling out on his bronzed neck. He fought down the ferocious rage that was trying to

drive him into seeing red and forced a ghastly smile, and said :—

“ All right. It saved my life and was worth it. Now can we talk about the mare ? ”

“ You are fined another fifty dollars for contempt of court,” ruled the court.

Hale closed his eyes for a moment and clinched his hands together to keep them from his belt. The court directed :—

“ Now you make out your case.”

The paper signed by Hill Beachy was presented and made an impression on Curks. Beachy was not a man to be trifled with. Pursing his lips and frowning at the writing, Curks finally said :—

“ Whatever Mr. Beachy says assays out one thousand in this court. He is a staunch pillar of this territory. But this writing does not identify you as the Calvin Hale who lost the mare.”

“ Just what I told him, your honour,” spoke up Swanger.

Curks glared the deputy into silence. Hale sighed resignedly and said :—

“ I am Calvin Hale. The mare will recognise me and no one else. She'll identify me. Have her fetched outside the door. I'll call her in here by word or whistle. If any other man can get her inside here I'll give him a bill of sale on the spot.”

The judge cleared his throat and slowly shook his head, and ruled :—

“ That wouldn't be legal identification. Assuming for the sake of my illustration that you are not the rightful owner, there's nothing to show the mare will not also answer the call of her real master, whereas all men here in Boise City are strangers to her except yourself. It will be necessary for you to go and bring in some one to identify you.”

The gray-green eyes threatened homicide although the thin lips retained the physical semblance of a smile.

"Meaning I must trapes way back to Oro Fino on the chance of finding some one who knows both me and you, and then to git that person to travel way down here, and me paying him for his lost time at the rate of eighteen dollars a day?"

"Get your witness where you will, or can. Doubtless you can find some one right here in Boise City."

Hale stood up, his hands resting on his hips, and his voice came in a husky whisper as he asked:—

"You mean to tell me that if I ain't lucky enough to find a man who knows both of us that I must lose my mare?"

"The law does not indulge in sentiments," said Curks crisply, his deep sunken eyes focused on the brown fingers so close to the two .36's. "The law is blind and deaf to everything except legal evidence."

Hale took one gliding step forward but came to a halt as a slim, dapper little man popped into view of the court by the simple process of squirming in between two burly miners.

"Just a minute, if your honour will be so kind," was the shrill request.

Hale eyed the little man in surprise. The judge straightened and mumbled:—

"Certainly, Mr. Riply. Always glad to hear Ben Riply when he speaks for law and order."

Ben Riply, of the Payette Committee, whose name was growing to be feared more by lawbreakers than all the safeguards to property and life the law had been able to establish, advanced with mincing steps and stood beside Hale. Peering up into Hale's face he queried:—

"Are you sometimes called Shoshoni Hale?"

"I'm called that more'n I am Calvin Hale."

"I recognise you. Your honour, I've never spoken to this man before and know nothing about him. I saw him in Lewiston this spring when he was pointed out to me as Shoshoni Hale. I am convinced he is the man Bill Beachy refers to in his writing."

"Shoshoni Hale," repeated the court in great surprise. Then he frowned severely and said. "There's queer stories about Shoshoni Hale. Can you speak as to his character, Mr. Ripley?"

"I know nothing about him. I have heard certain gossip, but gossip is usually slander and is never evidence for a court to consider. I am positive he is the man Beachy names."

Curks rubbed his chin and became busy with the record book. The machine was not working well when the combined efforts of the sheriff, judge and their numerous tools could not prevent one man from recovering his stolen property. Ripley, insignificant in person, symbolised that silent justice which struck without warning, which left its mark—"XXX"—placarded on more than one dangling victim, and which would not hesitate to apply its corrective methods to men in high places.

In all the history of America's development it would be difficult to find a situation similar to that existing in Ada and Boise counties, where the enforcement of the law was lodged in the hands of the lawless and with the actual work of regeneration being accomplished by vigilant committees. As an individual Ben Ripley was of no consequence; as the mouthpiece of the citizens' secret tribunal he exerted more influence than a garrison of soldiers. After making certain entries in his book the judge lifted his head and announced:—

"I find that this man claiming to be Calvin Hale, alias Shoshoni Hale, is the owner of the mare now in Kolb's stable. I find that the mare was stolen by

parties unknown and was bought by Ferdinand Patterson in all good faith. The claimant Hale is to receive the mare back upon his payment of one hundred dollars, being two fines imposed by this court, and upon the further payment of fifty dollars shrievalty fees. He must also pay for the keep of the mare at Kolb's stable, as it would be a cruel injustice to charge the same against Mr. Patterson, who is already a sufferer from his bargain."

Hale drew a deep breath and seemed to expand. Riply spoke up and inquired :—

" May I ask your honour why the thief is not requested to settle for the stable board ? Or does he remain unknown despite the fact that Kolb and Patterson both met him ? "

Before the court could answer Patterson replied :—

" I met him. He is a stranger to me. He told a likely story. It was I who took the mare to the stable."

Curks gravely announced :—

" This court will be only too happy to deal with the thief once he is taken into custody. I assume our sheriff is searching for him now."

" Four men hunting for him. I got the word while sitting here," spoke up Swanger.

Hale glanced down into Riply's solemn face and laughed. Pulling out a bag of gold dust he curtly inquired :—

" What are the stable charges ? "

Kolb coughed apologetically and " allowed " that thirty dollars would be about right. The court nodded an acceptance of these figures. Hale threw back his head and laughed raucously. Fortunately for himself and for the assemblage he had not lost his sense of humour. Luckily for Swanger and his henchmen he had come to town ignorant of the intolerable condition of affairs. And possibly it was well for the judge and

his tools that something extremely ludicrous was found by the man in the proposition that he could have his stolen property back after paying its worth. Riply's thin face grew sober as the stentorian laughter rang out over his head. Swanger and Patterson made ready to draw, while Curks pushed back his chair and thrust a hand between his long coat tails to grasp the handle of a bowie-knife.

Riply seized Hale's arm and shook it impatiently and whispered :—

" Pay up. Take your mare and get out ! I say it in a friendly spirit. If you try anything desperate I shall probably see you hang. I'm here to help Boise City clean up."

Hale suddenly ceased laughing, but it was not because of Riply's warning. A man was hurriedly working his way through the crowd to the judge's table. He carried a slip of paper in his hand. Obviously his errand must be connected with the case just decided ; and Shoshoni Hale was now convinced there were grave potentialities in anything the townsmen might say or do.

His gaze followed the man to the table and saw the judge receive and read the paper. He noted the bewilderment on the bony face. He saw Curks stare to the back of the room as if seeking the author of the communication. Instantly Hale's gaze swung about on the same business ; and his mouth opened as if to cry out. It was only a glimpse, the finish of what Curks had seen in its entirety, a bearded face raised above the level of the crowd and a hand pressed against the right cheek and shoved sharply upward.

With the growl of an animal Hale jumped up on a chair to further observe this man. But there were many bearded faces there, one looking much like another.

" Are you crazy ? Or have you lost your nerve ? " demanded Riply.

Dropping to the floor, Hale rubbed his hand across his forehead and brought it away wet with sweat.

"Perhaps a little of both," he muttered. "I must git out of this quick."

"Scared?" incredulously whispered Riply.

"Not of anything I can face. But of a knife thrust out from the darkness, or a hunk of lead shot at me from behind and by a man I wouldn't know if I met him a thousand times—yes; I'm afraid."

With that he walked to the table and threw down a bag of dust and curtly said:—

"Two hundred dollars worth. Keep the change for any one you've overlooked. And I'm in a hurry."

And as he spoke he turned his head and watched the door.

"In connection with the fine for aiming a mortal weapon I must ask you where you are from," announced Curks, savagely staring up at the set profile.

"Lewiston and Oro Fino."

"Before that?"

"Oregon. From 'fifty-nine to the end of 'sixty-two I worked for the Mullan road party."

"Before going to Oregon?"

"Why do you dig into my life when I was a younker? You seem keener for that than for learning if I owned the mare."

"You're addressing a duly organised court of justice in the territory of Idaho," warned Curks. "You have been fined for presenting a loaded fire-arm to the person of an inoffensive citizen. I must have something of your record."

With his broad hands on his hips and his face still turned toward the bearded faces at the door Hale slowly replied:—

"I was in Utah before going to Oregon."

"That's all," said Curks, sweeping the bag of dust into an inside pocket. "This court is adjourned."

Hale did not seem to hear the dismissal, but remained watching the door. A small hand yanked his arm, and Riply was saying:—

"It's time for you to go. Come. I've got your rifle."

Hale followed him to the door, the spectators filing out ahead of them. As he reached the door both hands dropped to his guns.

"None of that!" hissed Riply with a backward glance. "By the eternal! You'll swing yet if you don't behave."

"I ain't doing no harm," mumbled Hale, never shifting his gaze from the waiting mob of men ahead. "I'm just prepared. You don't seem to understand."

They passed out of the door and were greeted with a chorus of jeers. Hale halted and announced:—

"I just want to say half a dozen words. I can nail any damned thief that has the run of this town. There won't be any law business the next time I'm robbed."

"You come along and get your mare and ride out of town," angrily commanded Riply.

"I reckon you're on the level," said Hale. "We've heard things about you up Oro Fino way."

"I don't know whether you're on the level or not," grumbled Riply. "If gossip has the right of it, you're not."

Hale remained facing the mob. He asked of Riply:—

"Any of these men strangers in town?"

"I don't know. They come and go all the time."

"Who took that writing to the judge?"

"One of the town drunkards. No account."

"That Curks is a bad one. He comes from Utah."

"That don't signify. Why didn't you want to tell about living there?"

"I was only a boy when I quit there," was the evasive answer.

"Stop staring like you wanted to pick a fight, and come along. Who you expecting to see, anyway?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm looking."

"I don't aim to nose into your affairs, but if there's anything you want to tell me——"

"Much obliged. You mean well. You've done well. Once or twice I reckon I'd a commenced shooting if not for you."

"And filled a noose before morning. There's the stable keeper. Wait outside while I get your mare."

"Don't bother. I can take care of myself."

"Then step sharp. I've something else to do besides spending the day with you."

When Hale rode his dancing mare from the stable, Riply was waiting down the street and motioned him to rein in. He warned :—

"They won't drop this. And there's something you haven't told me. I'm afraid you'll be followed. The next time the odds will be all theirs. You'd better go back to the mountains for a spell."

Hale peered anxiously up the street. Riply wondered if his nerve was weakening.

"I ain't afraid of these low down dogs that bark when told," he muttered. "Did you see the man that sent the writing to the judge?"

"I didn't notice him."

Hale weighed something for a moment, made to ride on, then changed his mind and leaned low from the saddle and whispered :—

"Did you happen to see a man at the door have his hand like this?"

And he placed his right hand against his cheek, the fingers extending upward, and pushed it up until the

lobe of his ear was cradled between the thumb and index finger. Riply gazed at him in amazement.

"No; I saw nothing like that. What are you getting at anyway? The sun hasn't made your head feel queer, has it?"

Hale straightened in the saddle and made sure his rifle was securely in place.

"Just a bit of nonsense of mine. I'm a great feller for fun. I'll take your advice and ride back north. If I'm followed up there the odds won't be so great. Much obliged to you. So long."

Riply watched him canter down the street and into the Idaho City stage road. Under his breath he apostrophised the receding figure:—

"I hope you won't ever wear our trade-mark. Too pretty a built man to hang three crosses on. But there's something queer about you. Something queer besides all the yarns they tell. Better get north of the Clearwater and stay there."

CHAPTER III

UNDESIRED GOLD

HALE commenced the thirty-five mile ride to Idaho City at an easy pace, as he planned to camp for the night and did not desire to ride after dark. Pinaquana was eager to eat up the road in one long mad gallop, and tossed her head in saucy disapproval as the master held her down to a moderate gait. The west wind had an hour to blow before sunset terminated its labours. He proposed to ride into the twilight and then camp and make sure the mare had suffered no hurt during her capture and imprisonment.

As he passed the Umatilla stage-coach bound for Placerville he noticed the dust-smothered passengers and driver eyed him sharply. Each passenger had paid a hundred dollars for the privilege of taking a trip which would call for hearty congratulations if it ended without a hold-up. Hale was surprised at the interest he created, for the heat of the day and the discomforts of the journey must have wearied the travellers exceedingly.

He was still wondering at the unexpected show of interest when he overtook a long wagon train. This was hauled by horses and mules now that summer was well advanced and oxen, with their noses close to the alkaline dust, were supposed to sicken and die. Again he was conscious of being keenly scrutinised. And, as with the stage passengers—he thought he read

hostility in the men's gaze. He met stage-coaches and wagons bound for Oregon, Owyhee and California, all travelling by the way of Boise City, and at every encounter found himself the target for all eyes.

Also he caught fragments of comments which puzzled him. He learned the reason for this attitude when he met a small pack-train, guarded by a dozen heavily armed men. This escort proclaimed that a cargo of gold was being taken out. He swung out to one side of the road and several of the guards covered him with their rifles, and the leader warned :—

"Draw off, or we fire!"

Hale held up his empty hands and sent the mare swerving farther to the side, and cheerily called out :—

"I'm honest."

"Few honest men pack two heavy belt-guns round here besides toting a rifle," bawled the train boss. "You look too much like you might be running with Jem Helm's gang to suit us."

Hale's rifle was under his leg. To avoid unnecessary suspicion he shifted his heavy revolvers inside his shirt. From then on there was much less hostility shown by those he passed. But if the wayfarers had been interested in him he was chiefly concerned with the road behind him. The sun dropped below the Blue Mountains. The wind diminished in violence, and in the east appeared the twilight arch, the earth's shadow thrown into relief on the dust particles in the sky heights.

It was a magnificent piece of celestial engineering and spanned the heavens and grew in height as one looked. Its upper edge was clear cut at first, but soon faded as it rose higher above the horizon. Hale ignored the phenomenon as his one concern was to learn if any horsemen were following him from Boise City. This was the reason for his breaking the journey by camping ;

he would not ride when he could not see his back trail. So intent was he on watching the road behind he did not detect the trap laid for him in the junipers ahead. His first intimation of danger was the hoarse voice calling out :—

“ Put up your hands ! ” The command was followed by the clicking of gun-locks.

With his rifle inaccessible and his revolvers tucked inside his shirt he hesitated none in obeying the command. As the mare came to a halt a masked man emerged from the junipers. Two .36 calibre Colt revolvers were in his belt.

“ Hop down and keep quiet. Half a dozen guns are covering you,” said the masked man.

Hale obeyed. The man walked behind him and passed a hand around him and found the guns inside his shirt. He pulled them out and tossed them to one side, and remarked :—

“ You carry good guns. If we wasn’t already outfitted with the same brand we’d have to take ‘em. You must be a dangerous sort of a cuss. Walk behind them trees.”

Hale advanced into the ambush, the mare following at his heels. Behind the junipers were several heavily armed men, all masked. Their horses were cropping the bunch grass close by. One of them exclaimed :—

“ We got him.”

“ Looks that way. When Jem Helm goes for to git a man, let him be Lucky Tom the miner, or who he will, that man is usually bagged.” As he spoke he ran his hand inside Hale’s shirt and pulled out a small bag of dust. He continued his search and at last angrily declared, “ You’ve got more dust than this. You’re sober, so you couldn’t ‘a’ thrown it all away at the Tusk saloon.”

“ What dust he carries with him ain’t no account

alongside of the gulch where he gits it," said one of the men. "S'pose we git to work on the one prime idee. A little fire will make him lead us to it, or tell us where it is."

Hale laughed softly. "You fellows are barking up the wrong tree," he told them. "If you're after Lucky Tom you've missed him. He must have passed here several hours ago. At least, he left Boise City that much ahead of me. Killed a gambler in the Tusk when the gang there was trying to learn his secret. I'm Shoshoni Hale from Oro Fino way. Do I look like a prospector?"

The man who proclaimed himself to be the notorious Jem Helm examined him closely in the fading light and seemed especially impressed by the moccasins. He swore softly as he weighed the chances of having made a mistake. Then he said:—

"We've heard of Shoshoni Hale. But how do we know you're him?"

"He's the crazy miner. Lucky Tom started this way. This is the only horseman that comes anywhere near filling the bill. Toast his feet till he admits it."

"Shet up!" commanded Helm. To Hale, "How do we know you're Shoshoni Hale? Wouldn't a little fire make you sing another tune?"

"It certainly would. Burn my feet and I'll say anything you want me to. I'll say I'm President of the United States. But if I say I'm not Shoshoni Hale I'm a liar. In my inside pocket is a writing from Hill Beachy. I used it in gitting back my mare that was stolen from me and hid up in Boise."

The writing was quickly produced and read by Helm aloud.

"Enough to make a thousand devils mad!" fumed Helm. "Boys, he ain't the cuss we're looking for. He talks according to book."

"He knows too much to be turned loose," some one insisted.

"I was told by Ben Riply to git up north and stay there," said Hale.

"Best way is to take no chances, then we won't be sorry."

Helm called for silence, and said:—

"Queer yarns are told about Shoshoni Hale. I've often thought you'd make a good man for my gang."

Hale replied:—

"No; I'd want to be boss and we'd fight and one of us would be killed. That would be a foolish waste of material. You're welcome to this country. I always stay north of the Clearwater."

This frankness did not displease Helm. He accepted the statement for face value.

"Prick up your ears like a coyote. Wolf didn't ought to eat wolf. I won't take your guns, nor mare. You can go back to the road and find your guns and clear out. We'll keep your dust, but if you catch any of us on your stamping grounds you can return the favour."

"All right. I'll remember. But I stand a small chance of paying you off as I've never seen any of you unmasked."

"And you never will," chuckled Helm. "Every one talks about Helm but he can go into Idaho City under a different name and no vigilant would know him. Now go, but don't try any games. Just ride away. And remember this; don't travel these parts again unless you're carrying plenty of dust. It makes the boys mad."

"I'll try and do better next time. Trouble is some robbers in Boise City got at me first."

"Don't say anything about this in Idaho City. My men will be there, and you can't yip but what some of them will hear you."

"I shall say nothing in Idaho City. Do I go now?"

Helm nodded and Hale leisurely returned to the road, the mare crowding at his heels. He recovered his revolvers and rode on. The theft of the pouch left him penniless, but he accepted it philosophically. There were one or two friends in Idaho City who would be glad to stake him. He spurred along to make up for lost time and kept a sharp watch for a likely spot for spreading his blankets. The mare suddenly shied as a man crashed through the bushes and yelled at him.

Enraged at what he believed to be a second hold-up, Hale slipped to the ground and rested an eight-inch barrel across the saddle and grimly announced:—

"I've just been robbed. I have nothing but this mare and guns. If you want them you must kill me."

"Don't cry afore you're hurt," replied a voice which was slightly familiar. "No one has a call to throw a gun on Lucky Tom of Lost Gulch. I wouldn't turn my hand over for all the gold west of the Rockies. I know where I can git it by the bushel. Friend, what I'd admire for to have is a drink. I'll pay fancy for it. I've got a bit of fire back here and a pan of bacon cooking. I heard your horse and hoped you might be packing something good for a dry throat."

"I'm packing nothing but guns, but I'll join your fire."

"Thought every one out of Boise packed whisky," sighed the miner. "Well, come along and have some bacon and tell me about this robbery business. I laid down in here to rest and fell asleep, or I'd been in Idaho City afore this."

Hale followed him through the thicket to a small fire burning in a circle of rocks. A big frying-pan of bacon was simmering on a flat rock in the circle. The miner gave Hale one glance and thrust forward a hairy paw and excitedly cried:—

"Dawg-gone my old boots! If it ain't the mountain man that give me my chance to light out when I was in trouble! You're more welcome than whisky, man. You're white. What do you call yourself?"

"Shoshoni Hale."

"The Injun feller?"

"They talk a lot of foolishness about me. I know some Indians. Have some good friends among them. They're either for you or against you for the limit."

"I don't care if you're full of Injun blood. You turned a good card for me. What they doing about it in Boise? Got folks scouting after me for killing that snake?"

"Patterson, a gambler, buried the dead man and insists it was a fair fight. I don't reckon there'll be any trouble. But you'd better keep away for a while. The Boise City gang will stand up for you so long as they think you'll show them your diggings. Ben Riply's down there talking vigilance committee to some of the merchants. Stay clear is my advice."

"That's hoss sense," muttered Lucky Tom. "Them vigilants are nasty sometimes. Reckon I'll drift to Centerville, or Pioneer City, where I can finish out my drunk. Idaho City's my first choice, but it's too much like being in Boise. What about being robbed? Making game of me?"

Hale related his experience with Jem Helm. Lucky Tom chuckled much to think how the outlaw had been taken in. Then looked grave and muttered:—

"Still I ain't out of the woods yet. He may jump me here."

"If he does we'll stand them off. I'm tired of being knocked about and abused," rumbled Hale.

"That's good talk. Say, I'm lonely."

"Cash in your gold dust and visit the coast."

"I mean I'm lonely as a hound pup. I need the company of a man I can trust. You assay out top-high. I'm going to take you in as my partner. It's devilish lonesome up in Lucky Gulch."

"I'd be more of a bother than a help. Then I've got a heap of trouble of my own. For the next few months I'll be busy dodging knives in the back."

"You don't say! Well, don't talk less you want to, but my ears are burning."

"Some one's after me. Been after me a long time."

"Plug 'em! You seem to have a pretty gun-way with you."

"I don't know who they are."

"You talk like you was me when I'm drunk. Folks you never knew chasing you around to do you dirt when you ain't looking? Ain't that hell!"

The miner was inclined to be sceptical.

"That the truth of it."

Lucky Tom snorted and sarcastically remarked:—

"Funny that complete strangers should hanker for your blood."

"Funny? You bet! I wake up in the middle of the night and laugh when I think about it."

A broad grin expanded the miner's face.

"You're a queer cuss. If you've got a dish in your blanket roll, pitch into the bacon. If you haven't one, use mine."

Hale produced his tin plate and the bacon and somehardtack were divided. After they had eaten and had filled their pipes the miner asked:—

"The Helm gang cleaned you out, huh?"

"About two miles below here. Skinned me clean. Had my guns tucked inside my shirt like a derned fool and never had a chance. Still, they was pretty decent. Mistook me for you and had to have something for

their trouble ; but they let me keep the mare and my guns. I ain't kicking."

" Lucky they didn't git me penned ! They'd burned the truth out of me about the gulch if they'd tried tickling my feet." After a brief pause he continued, " I'm talking free to you because you're a white man. Come in with me and I'll make your fortune. I ain't got nary a relation in the whole world. I ain't got any use for dust 'cept to buy whisky and tobaccer. There's enough for the whole basin. I'm gitting scared in my old age. They'll snag me sure some day ; then they'll tickle my feet and I'll tell the truth, and then they'll wipe me out. Next time I quit the gulch it'll be for good. I'll make the coast by the Mullan road. You'll be welcome to what I'll be leaving. Heap of it, too."

" Thanks. But I can't do it. I'm being hunted. They'll kill the man they find me with. Up north of the Clearwater I have friends, both red and white. Strangers are soon spotted and I'll have a chance to put up a fight. If I win out I'll remember your offer and play gunman for you if you're the same way of thinking."

" You must feel mighty squeamish about these unknown fellers when it makes you pass up the best placer in Idaho. And to do it at that when you're cleaned out."

" They started after me years ago when I was a boy. It was an awful jounce to me, being a kid. I was scared nearly crazy. All I thought of was crawling off to the mountains and hiding. It's hard for me to remember that I'm grown up. The boy keeps cropping out in me. If I could find out just who they are I wouldn't mind so much. Judge Curks at Boise knows 'em, I'm sure. It was the boy's fear that kept me in the mountains and with the road-builders instead of mixing with

strangers every day in a hunt for gold. I was beginning to believe the trail was dead ; but to-day I learned better."

The miner pulled a heavy bag from under his worn blankets and tossed it across the fire, remarking :—

" You're broke. Mighty poor plan when you're running from the devil. Don't open your yawp like that but take this dust. It's so much dirt to me. You treated me white. What man's safe to leave word with in Idaho City as to where we can meet after you've shook the skunks off your trail ? "

Hale promptly replied :—

" Either ex-sheriff Pinkham, or Jack Gorman, who used to be a deputy. Both are my friends. I'll remember this dust. It's mighty neighbourly of you."

" The hell it is ! And me offering you half my gulch and you turning it down ! Talk to me ! Tell me things that don't have to do with mines and miners. Talk about sheep. Women. Anything 'cept gold."

" I don't know anything about sheep except the greathorn cores of mountain sheep I've found bleaching in the sage. And women ? Lord bless you ! They're a new animal to me. I haven't seen but few white women since I was fifteen. I've talked with not more'n a dozen ; that is, real white women. All I seem to know is road building and Injun ways."

" I'd admire to hear about road building," gravely said Lucky Tom and he settled back and puffed his pipe in huge contentment.

So Hale began a narrative of the trials and adventures attending the construction of the Mullan road. He knew his subject thoroughly and the miner was a hungry listener. He talked for more than an hour.

" If I could only have you to spout to me in Lost Gulch !" the miner sighed when Hale finished and insisted they should go to sleep. " I reckon why I'm

so keen for whisky is the talk that fills the places where it's sold. I never tote any into the gulch to drink when alone.

"Well, you can't shake me till we reach Idaho City ; that's fact."

"Turn in then ; for I start early. Where's your horse ? "

"Round somewhere. Turned him loose when I first got in here. Probably down to the creek."

Hale rolled up in his blanket, keeping his belt guns with him. The miner said :—

"You've forgot to hobble your mare."

"Can't drive her from me. She'll go to the creek for a drink and then come back. That young lady knows more'n most women, I reckon."

The miracle of the morning was well under way when they rolled from their blankets. The night had been cold and the dawn was chilly. The miner, weakened by his recent debauch, was glad to sit by the fire, his blankets wrapped about him. Hale fried hardtack with the bacon and boiled coffee. What might have been depressing in winter, or have remained concealed in broad daylight, was once more revealed. The mountains to the north and northwest were within pistol shot.

The distant Salmon River and Bitter Root Mountains seemed to be close at hand, every ramification of their far-flung slopes being clearly visible. The miner did not raise his gaze from the ground, and once Hale had wiped the smoke from his eyes he desired only to be away with this, the first light. The mare was eager for the road, too ; she had stood over him when he awoke.

"You squat there and watch the bacon. I'll fetch up your horse," Hale volunteered.

"Hate to be waited on, but there's ice in my bones this morning," mumbled Lucky Tom. "And my

boots are so busted out they hurt me to travel. I've put off buying a new pair for a year, but now I've come to it, I reckon."

Hale started for the creek but thought he heard a horse wandering about near the road and turned back in that direction. He broke through the thicket just as the Boise City stage coach rolled by. Sleepy eyes opened wide on glimpsing the tall figure belted with the long revolvers. Deciding it was the approach of the coach that had deceived him he re-entered the thicket and in a detour made for the creek. He soon found the miner's horse. He removed the hobbles and had sprung on to the animal's back when two gunshots shattered the quiet of the morning. For a moment he remained rigid, then pulled his guns and galloped back to the camp. He thought he heard the clumping of hoofs in the road but could not be positive.

The bacon was sizzling in the pan. The coffee was boiling on the coals. Lucky Tom still sat by the fire, his head bowed on his chest. The mare stood half-concealed among the bushes, her ears pricked forward in greeting to her master. Hale ran to the miner and placed a hand on his shoulder. Lucky Tom lifted his head and settled back against the strong arm and muttered:—

"*Bang! Bang!* Felt like a giant had grabbed me and was shaking the liver out of me. I'm going to cash in."

"No, no," cried Hale, his face ghastly with the horror of it. "I don't believe you've been hit. Who were they, how many, where did they go?"

"Don't know. Didn't see 'em. Prospect round my back and you'll find colour. Open my pack and git paper and pencil. Move spry-like."

He would have toppled into the fire had not Hale caught him and eased him to the ground. Hale tore,

open the hickory shirt and found a gaping wound, one which only a ball of large calibre could have made. He believed the assassins had used a buffalo-gun. There was a red welt across the top of the shoulder where another bullet had sped. He had been shot from behind, and Hale's experience with such wounds warned him the man had but a short time to live. He had seen Indians make remarkable recovery from wounds that must have been fatal to white men, but even an Indian could not survive this gruesome hurt.

"The paper," murmured the miner.

Hale took a pad of paper and pencil from the shabby pack, Lucky Tom grinned on beholding them and explained :—

"Fool notion of mine. Took 'em to the gulch so's I could draw picters when I felt lonely. Boost me up and let me lean against you."

"You'd better keep quiet."

"Don't bully a dead man. Up with me."

Hale dropped beside him and lifted him and supported him with arms and shoulder. The miner scrawled laboriously, his tongue thrust into the corner of his mouth much like a schoolboy writing his first exercise.

"Tear it off. Keep it," he whispered. "Wish I had a drink." Hale started to lower him back to the ground but was sharply commanded : "No! Wait!"

This time he worked rapidly and skilfully; and Hale perceived he was drawing a map of some mountains south of the Payette river. As the pencil filled in the paper Hale recognised the country.

"Where I marked G means Gulch," feebly explained the miner. "Enter from the east. Mouth hid by landslide. Narrow opening along side of high cliff. Grape-vines. Place looks narrer. Plenty room. My wickyup's there. Never build fire 'cept at night and

in my fire-hole. Overhanging cliff going to bust loose some day. Never enter or quit only at night and when you know you ain't traileed. Do as I've done and all hell can't find you."

Hale laid him back and groaned:—

"God! To know who did it!"

The mare squealed and advanced toward the fire. With a sharp intake of breath Hale lifted his head and stared at the white star on the black, glossy coat. He believed he thoroughly understood all that had happened. He had been followed from Boise City. When he broke the thicket and into the road in search of Tom's horse he had been seen by his pursuers and recognised. They were not on the stage-coach but were mounted. It was one of their animals he had heard and had supposed it was Tom's horse. They had dismounted and had followed him back toward the camp. While he was at the creek, they had crept up and had seen the man before the fire. Near by they had seen the mare with the white star. Pinaquana's presence had identified the muffed figure as her owner. They had fired the two shots at what they supposed to be Shoshoni Hale, and believing they had killed their man they had fled.

"Man! Man!" sobbed Hale, bending over his new friend. "Tom, man! They took you for me. I brought death to you."

"Good joke on 'em. They held you up for me. Find 'em sometime—gunway with you."

His head rolled to one side and he began breathing in a stertorous manner. Hale ran to the creek and brought water, but Lucky Tom of Lost Gulch had taken his last drink. And he passed out with a whimsical smile on his lips, as if his last thoughts had been of amusement at the rare joke the murderers had played on themselves by killing the wrong man. Hale covered

the still form with blankets and picked up the two sheets of paper. It was Lucky Tom's dying wish that he profit by the mine. The map told him how to find it. The writing deeply affected him as he read :—

This paper shows i give my mine in lucky gulch to shoshon hale my only frend i give him paper showin how to find it 2 strangers shot me in the back whil hale was huntin for my hoss at the crick. lucky Tom.

CHAPTER IV

A TRICK FOR PATTERSON

FOR three years men had passed through Idaho City in pursuit of gold and silver, and each new discovery threw the Territory into a fresh frenzy. Memory had to go back only two years when a cabin site on Moore's Creek proved to be worth three hundred thousand dollars. From the very beginning of placer mining on Grime's Creek eighty dollars to a pan was not uncommon, and bushels of gold were picked up from the gravel of Bannack, as Idaho City was called until the spring of 'sixty-four.

From the first influx of prospectors to the country one golden sensation after another had keyed the public mind to a fever pitch. If there were a lull in the Snake River basin then the Beaver Head country on the head-waters of the Jefferson fork of the Missouri called over the mountains for all to come to the enormously rich diggings. Virginia City, contemporaneous with the Boise basin towns, boasted of boat-loads of gold going down to Fort Benton and thence to Home.

But the country west of the Bitter Root range easily held its own as a magnet, and if men swarmed east to the Beaver Head diggings, so, also, did men frantically hasten west as the gold quartz mines and silver bearing ledges began to be uncovered. With ten to a dozen pack-trains arriving daily at the Boise mines, with endless freight-trains bringing from twenty-five hundred to five thousand pounds of supplies to a wagon, with a

wagon full of cats bringing ten dollars apiece for the felines, while an equal number of chicks vanished at five dollars each, with the Ida Elmore yielding two hundred and seventy dollars a ton, the Snake country had no cause to be jealous of the region afterward set off as the territory of Montana.

And what a galaxy of names for a quartz miner to worship ! What a world of romance and tragedy associated with each ! There was the Barker and Eastern, the Ophir and Idaho. There was the Independence, the Southern Confederacy, and the Esmeralda. There was the General Lane, the Western Star, the Golden Star, Mandocino, the Abe Lincoln, the Emmet and Hibernia. In the list was mirrored the travail and glory of history in the making.

The Pioneer on Granite Creek assayed from six thousand to twenty thousand dollars a ton for the best rock, while the Gambrinus, although short lived, was tremendously rich, and men were near to insanity when they babbled about pieces of fallen rock glittering with gold. With all this profusion of yellow treasure it might be expected that the public mind would be proof against the lure of a baser metal. Then came the discovery on Jordan creek in the Owyhee district of wonderful silver ledges, and the land once more was topsy-turvy in a mad scramble to profit by the new offerings.

Thus for three years Idaho City, in common with its neighbours, had lived only on the peaks of excitement. And now the town seethed with the most unique sensation of all, unique because it had never been dreamed of.

It was said that diamonds were to be had for the taking. Governor Lyon, erratic and unwise, if not unbalanced, had made the discovery ; and what was more remarkable, he was in New York City at the time. This seeming geographical impossibility vanishes

when it is added that the governor's discovery was vicarious. The men and women of early Idaho were so used to the uncovering of wonderful riches that when the governor returned from the East, and his "discovery" made there became talked about, the presence of the precious stones was accepted as but another illustration of the region's prodigality.

The town was too busy in listening to and in repeating each wild rumour to give much heed to newcomers. Hale left his mare and rifle in a stable and walked forth to find his friends. It was his first visit to the town since the fire. He found Main and Wall Streets compactly rebuilt, although the fire was a scant three months old. These thoroughfares were filled with eager, nervous men and a considerable number of women. Marion and Montgomery Streets, running for half a mile parallel to Elk creek, presented a similar degree of activity. He did not venture into the rest of the town which lay scattered over the rising ground behind Elk and Moore Creeks. There were between eight and ten thousand human beings helping to make things hum when Hale added his tall figure to the busy throngs.

Three newspapers took time off from an acrid war against Oregon's alleged endeavours to control the Territory's trade to fan high the flames of expectancy by faithfully advertising each new discovery, rumoured or actual. Some three hundred places of business helped the miner to spend his gold. Stores were filled to the doors from morning until closing time, and, as in Boise City, gambling saloons could scarcely accommodate their customers. For those seeking less hectic entertainment three theatres catered nightly.

Failing to locate by wandering the streets either Sumner Pinkham, the former sheriff, or Jack Gorman, Hale decided to take up some central position and wait for the stream of passing humanity to bring them to

him. He dropped into a saloon and took a seat in a corner and after ordering a drink proceeded to make some plans. Any moment might precipitate a crisis in his affairs. He was counting much on the advice of Pinkham, a shrewd, nerve-proof son of Maine. Failing in that he purposed seeking counsel from Gorman, a younger and more fiery fellow, but a staunch friend and one well thought of in the town because of his promptness in quelling the bread riot just before the big fire.

A man rushed through the door and up to the bar and loudly proclaimed :—

“ Lyon has been here and has sneaked off to the hills to pick up the diamonds ! ”

“ Drink down and shut up ! Lyon’s in town now,” some one answered the newcomer.

“ Mebbe ; but he wouldn’ta come back here if it wa’n’t for the diamonds. A hell of a governor Washington sends us ! ”

“ That’s a true word ! ” bellowed a red-faced stage-driver. “ Down in Boise City they’re saying that out of seventy thousand dollars sent Lyon for the Nez Perces only twenty thousand dollars can be accounted for.”

“ Curse the Injuns ! Twenty thousand is too much for ‘em. We’re interested in diamonds. Who’s seen any ? ” yelled an inebriated miner.

“ I have,” spoke up a black-hatted, white-shirted and exquisitely booted specimen of the gambling tribe. “ And I know diamonds. The one I saw is genuine. I don’t know where it came from, but if I did I wouldn’t tell. The fellow swore it’s an Idaho stone.”

The proprietor of the place paused in his promenade down the inside of the long bar and told the gambler :—

“ D. H. Fogus come up from Owyhee and gave Lyon a five-hundred dollar bar of silver for one small stone. It’s said that they’re going to work together. Lyon

got on to the whole business by meeting a fellow named Davis in New York. Davis had a lot of small diamonds he'd picked up down Owyhee way. He took Lyon along with him when he sold one for a thousand dollars."

"A small stone fetch a thousand?" gasped the stage-driver. "By godfrey! I'm through with the ribbons! I go back to Jordan Crick a passenger on the first coach for Ruby City. A thousand dollars for a small stone! Say, partner, what might be the size of such a stone?" The last to the gambler.

The gambler extended a hand and touched one of several small stones set in a circlet ring and explained:—

"I gave fifteen hundred for each of those stones in Frisco. Allowing for high prices on the coast and in this town, I'd say about that size."

He was instantly surrounded by an eager, pawing crowd. He held out his hand patiently until they had taken turns in looking at the gem. One man voiced the doubt of all by deploring:—

"But how's a body to know when he's found di'monds? They're so danged small! Any little bit of shiny pebble might be a little di'mon."

"And worth a thousand dollars!" exploded the stage-driver.

"The best way's to find a likely looking location and rake all the small stuff into boxes and barrels and then sort it over at night when a candle will make 'em shine," one man solemnly suggested.

This was voted to be a most excellent idea, and a long row of men insisted on buying a round of drinks in honour of the suggestion. The gambler smiled cynically and reminded:—

"The governor's the only one to know where to look."

"Then we'll trail him!" vowed the stage-driver.

The proprietor toyed with a small drink and confidentially told the whole room:—

"Fogus as much as let out to me that diamonds can be found right near this town as well as in the Owyhee district."

"That's why Lyon is back here instead of down in Owyhee."

"They can be found in one part of Idaho as well as in another," the stage-driver optimistically declared.

"This is quite a sizable chunk of country," said the gambler quietly, as he turned to depart. "Gentlemen, I am too fond of the night to spend my waking hours in hunting sparklers. I'm going to bed now so's to be fresh for the evening. But if you want to find diamonds you want to keep watch of Lyon and Fogus. Once they lead you to the diggings you can all rush in and help yourselves. And the best luck to you all and may you come back here and drop some of your hauls at my table."

This sentiment was loudly cheered. Hale pushed back his chair and was on the point of following the gambler's example when his friend Pinkham entered by the back door. He halted to gaze over the excited crowd and caught Hale's gesture and joined him. After shaking hands warmly Pinkham said:—

"Got your guns on, eh? Good. Got wind you was in town half an hour ago. Follow me out the back door and into Pitt's store-room up the street. If we meet Ferd Patterson be ready to drop him. He's after you. It was his yelping that told me you was here. Heard him brag to some friends at the Gold Dust Saloon that you'd arrived and was his meat."

Without a word Hale rose and followed his friend to the door. Pinkham emerged first and glanced up and down the street and motioned for Hale to join him.

"You go ahead and be ready for business. I'll bring up the rear and watch out," he said.

Hale strode off and the two reached the rear end of

the Heffron and Pitts store without any opposition. The former sheriff led the way into a shed used as a store-room and seated himself on a box facing the door and motioned to Hale to sit at his side. Then he demanded :—

“ What’s up between you and Patterson ? ”

Hale, close-lipped, related his experience at Boise City, and as he talked his gaze never left the open door and his hands never left his hips.

“ Updyke is behind this,” said Pinkham when Hale finished. “ He and his gang are worse than Jem Helm. Not satisfied with robbing you of two hundred dollars through that rascal Curks they’re out to get you. Patterson just come in and told his crowd that he saw you on the street, that he was afraid of you, and that you had threatened to kill him on sight, that he would protect his life and begin firing the first time he saw you. That establishes his alibi of self-defence.”

“ Did he come horseback, or on the coach ? ”

“ Coach. Sydney Bill was with him.”

“ Don’t know him even by sight.”

“ You haven’t missed much.”

“ Where can I find Patterson ? ”

“ You get your mare and clear out. If he kills you—and he’ll take every advantage—he’s got it fixed with Bowen, the sheriff, to go scot-free. If you kill him they’ll swing you. I’m your friend and I say for you to light out. There’ll be other chances for you to meet up with Patterson.”

Hale was silent for a minute, then bitterly surrendered.

“ All right. Your medicine is good. I’ll go. But it isn’t Patterson I’m running from. He doesn’t count above a four-spot. But there are other men after me, men I don’t know. I’ll take Patterson’s guns away from him and slap his face. But those others ! To feel

that every stranger you meet may pot you from behind. Pinkham, I'm scared of that kind."

The former sheriff stared at him in amazement and muttered:—

"Guess I never did understand you. You've let drop some hints before this. Of course it's your business."

"I'd tell you if I was ready to tell any one. But it's the kind of business that makes bad listening for one's friends. I mustn't bring you into it."

"Blast your long face, Shoshoni! Think I'm a child to be scared by a bugaboo."

"This goes back for some time," mumbled Hale. "I've kept north in the mountains hoping it would quit dogging me. When I was a younker I had a bad scare. It burned a hole through my soul that's never healed up. I can't shake off a certain feeling I have that I'm to be downed from behind with nary a chance to go for my gun. If I could set eyes on the men who are gunning for me so I'd know 'em when we meet I'd be the happiest man in the Territory. It's the uncertainty that takes the sand out of me. There's one man who knows who the men are, I reckon. But I don't have much chance of gitting him alone."

"Who's he?" snapped the ex-sheriff.

"Curks in Boise City."

"Maybe I can reach him for you. But Patterson is one man you know about. You ride down the Payette Valley road and up north where they can't take you by surprise. I'll see if I can't prospect this Curks for the truth. If I get it I'll send it on to you. You'll better start right away."

"Wait. I have something to tell you. I've been hunting the streets for you and Jack Gorman. I'm in a fix." And he told of the murder of Lucky Tom, and produced the map and writing signed by the dead man.

In concluding he said, "They didn't want my mare or gold dust—just me. None of Updyke's hand in that. It's a sample of how they plan to git me. Tom was killed because they saw my mare and thought he must be me. He never caught a glimpse of 'em. I'd have given a year of my life after it was all over if you could have been there to tell me what to do. I didn't dare bring his body in here and show the writing, for then they'd say I killed him after learning his secret and wrote this paper myself. To bring him in without showing the writing would have the whole pack saying : I killed him because he wouldn't tell me his secret. So I buried him near the creek and turned his horse loose to be picked up by the first passing wagon train. If it hadn't been for telling you or Gorman I should have pushed north without coming here."

Pinkham chewed the ends of his moustache as he chewed the problem over. At last he said :—

"It's mighty ugly no matter which way you look at it. You did the best thing in burying him and in keeping your mouth shut. As I figure it out there's none who knows you camped with him except the fellows who killed him ; and for the time being they'll be thinking they plugged you. My first thought was to take some of the merchants into our confidence and tell them the whole thing, just as it happened. They know me and will bank on anything I say about you. But to prove the writing was genuine some one might ask you to let them try the map to make sure it wasn't any make-believe map. Once you did that the diggings would be open to every one. So I size it up like this ; no one knows you were with Tom except his murderers, and they won't know it unless they see you before you get away. If they find out after you're gone that you are alive they can't charge you with killing him without showing themselves up to you so's you'll know who

they are. Sort of goes round in a circle. Did they ride north or south?"

"I don't know for sure, but am pretty positive they went south. Believing they'd finished me and being in with Curks they'd go back to Boise City. Understand, Updyke had no hand in this, or he'd gone for the dust."

"It's a dad-gummed puzzle," growled Pinkham. "I'll chew it over some more. Now you be stirring. Get started."

"I don't like the notion of Patterson crowing round town that he made me run," demurred Hale. "I've shown him up once; him and his shiny boots and woman's hands! I'm willing for him to git his gun clear—"

"None of that, my son! I never meddled with your affairs. What I know about you is only what you've told me. That's all I ask. But there's more'n one man who believes and says that you're a queer customer. Folks can't understand why a strong man, knowing the country as you do, keeps at road building and hunting instead of going crazy about gold and silver and diamonds."

"But you understand how I can't feel free to go where I'll meet strangers. I'll git over that feeling only after I learn who the men are that riddled poor Lucky Tom."

"You don't have to hash that over for me, son. I know. I'm just saying what folks are talking, who don't know any reason why you should keep out of the game, or why you go ranging round with Injuns. Now, on the hoof!"

"You're my friend. I'll git my rifle and mare and go."

"One thing. What kind of a gun do you calculate Tom was shot with?"

" Buffalo gun."

" That's handy to know if ever they bring it home to you. I can swear you carry a Henry. Guess that's all."

Hale rose and shook hands warmly.

" You've been a mighty good friend to me, Pinkham. Once I locate this placer of poor Tom's I'll take you in. Like Tom, I haven't kin. Good-bye. No need of your trailing round with me. I'll follow this back street down to the stable on the Boise road and strike off for Centerville without going through the town."

Pinkham preceded him to the door and reconnoitred the street. Various stores and saloons backed on it and the buildings on the other side were few and scattered.

" Patterson will probably be at the Gold Dust. I'll go there and tag him round. If he meets up with you before you can light out I'll be on hand to see you get an even stake. Good-bye and good luck."

" Remember you're to have a slice of the diggings."

They shook hands again and Pinkham remained by the door, hand on his gun, and watched the tall figure swing down the road to the outlying stable. Then he passed through the store and walked along the main street to look for the gambler at the Gold Dust.

Hale saw nothing that suggested trouble, and striking into the stage road soon reached the stable. The moment he entered he received a great surprise: Old Idaho's daughter, the Prescott girl. She was still wearing her boy's togs and looked very young as she sat on a box and nursed a new Henry rifle. The moment she saw Hale she leaped to her feet and ran to him, crying:—

" My goodness! How did you get here?"

" Just happened along," said Hale, wondering if he should drop the small hand or wait for her to withdraw it.

The stable-keeper came up and anxiously inquired :—

“ Do you know this young boy-gall ? ”

“ Of course I know her. Ain’t I talking to her ? ”

“ Thank God you know her ! ” cried the keeper.

“ Then you can coax her away from here.”

“ What do you mean by such crazy talk ? ”

“ She’s spiling my business. Driv two men away already,” was the bitter reply.

The girl rested a hand on Hale’s arm and explained : “ They said bad things when they saw I was a girl. I told them I’d shoot them.”

“ Bully for you, little lady,” warmly approved Hale.

“ Next time do your talking after you shoot. How did you come here ? ”

He was now very proud to find he could use his tongue, that his strange embarrassment in her presence was leaving him.

“ Made granddaddy bring me. I couldn’t rest till I got my rifle. Ain’t it fine we two should meet here ? ”

“ The best thing I could wish for,” he told her. “ But why are you waiting here alone ? ”

“ I’m not alone so long as I have my rifle. Now you’ve come I have two for company. We left our horses here. Granddaddy had some business. He left me here while he went back to finish up.”

“ Why didn’t he take you with him ? ”

“ I don’t like your talk,” she informed him. “ I reckoned you’d be glad I was here, that you could see me.”

“ I am ; I am,” he warmly declared. “ But you git to town so seldom—and there are stores to visit—and—and— Well, Miss Harriet, I ain’t a polite man. I never had a chance to git the sabe of it. I’m about as much at home with young women as I’d be with eagles. But something tells me that you shouldn’t be left alone in stables.”

"This is a honest place of business and no one asked that young wild-cat to stick around here," spoke up the angry stable-keeper.

"My friend, you speak again and I'll throw you through the roof," gently warned Hale. To the girl, "How long have you waited?"

"Nearly an hour. He must have stopped to get some whisky. Sometimes he drinks too much."

"Did he have much dust with him?"

"Quite a bit."

Hale thought it over for half a minute. The last thing he wanted to do was to leave her. On the other hand it would never do for the old man to become incapacitated in Idaho City with money in his clothes. He decided his only course was to restore the old man to his granddaughter. His lean face was almost radiant as he next realised there was nothing to stop him from enjoying the girl's company down the valley. His road was theirs and he could ride with them as far as the cabin. If they should insist on his tarrying a bit it would be proof his luck was holding strong. Taking the stable-keeper aside he said:—

"I'm going to find the little lady's grandfather. I've told her to kill any man who insults her while I'm gone. If any does insult her I'll cut off both your ears when I come back. Maybe I'll kill you. Do you understand that talk?"

The keeper nodded his head violently and hoarsely defended:—

"I can't stop strangers from speaking to her. If a man comes in and says 'howdy' she'd probably say she was 'sulted, and bore him. Now there's a cubby-hole back there where I sit and keep my accounts. She can stay in there. You get her to do it. And you'll fetch the old man soon, I hope."

"As soon as I find him. Little lady, you're to be

patient. There's a little room in back where you can wait for me to come back. I'll have your grandfather here in no time. Then I'll ride along with you, if I may."

"We'd be awfully pleased. That would more'n pay for my waiting in this place. I've got so many things I want to tell you and ask you. Don't you feel as if we'd known each other for a long time?"

"I'd be sorry to think of the time when I didn't know you."

"Just like we'd grown up together, you my big brother."

Hale looked dubious; then smiled sheepishly.

"All right. I'll be big brother. Never had no practice, but I'll do my best."

He knew he was running the risk of encountering Patterson by this return to town. Pinkham would be off his guard, taking it for granted the mare was bearing him rapidly away. Yet his heart was light as he took up his search, and his hand was ready for his revolver. Each glance was twofold in purpose, to discover the gambler bent on making his kill and to find Old Idaho.

His first stop was at the saloon where Pinkham had found him. He believed Old Idaho would start to rejoin his granddaughter and pause for whisky at the various bars. He was much pleased to behold the old man. He was disgusted to observe his behaviour. He was talking garrulously and seemed to be half-intoxicated. Several men gathered about him were encouraging him to cut the cards for sizable wagers. He was being robbed most openly, although he was permitted to win occasionally. All the onlookers understood and yet none stepped in to object. Hale pushed forward and caught Old Idaho's arm and commanded:—

"Come along! Your granddaughter is waiting for you."

Old Idaho stared foolishly into the stern face for a few moments, then recognised him and muttered :—

“ The tall cuss who lost the black mare. Have a snicker of whisky.”

“ One drink. Then we must go. Miss Harry’s waiting at the stable. Worried, too.”

“ I must ‘a’ been longer than I’d reckoned on,” mumbled the old man. “ One drink and we’ll go.”

The interruption did not please Idaho’s new acquaintances. One of them had just lost an ounce as further bait for the old man and was in an ugly mood. Thrusting himself between Idaho and Hale he demanded of the latter :—

“ Who in hell be you to come dancing and raring in here like a wild Injun ? ”

Driving the flat of his hand into the scowling face and sending the fellow bumping against the bar, Hale replied :—

“ I’m called Shoshoni Hale. Keep away ! ”

“ The Injun man ! ” yelped the fellow so roughly repulsed ; nor did he offer to move away from the bar.

“ Any Injuns I run around with wouldn’t be found dead with you, you coyote.” Then to the bartender, “ Never mind that other drink. My friend here is going now.”

He slipped his arm around Old Idaho’s waist and made for the rear door.

Some one crowded against him and whispered :—

“ Look out for yourself, Shoshoni. I’ll take care of the old man. Patterson’s outside. You’re bound to meet him.”

Hale halted and twisted his head. It was Jack Gorman. With a grunt of relief he relinquished his hold on Idaho and stepped aside for the two to leave the room ahead of him.

"Take him down to the stable on the stage road, Jack," he directed. "I'll be along later."

"I wouldn't quit you if Pinkham wasn't close at hand," murmured Gorman.

Hale faced the gathering in the saloon and observed how intently some of them were staring at him. The bartender surreptitiously whispered to a customer, who repeated it to another man. As the word was passed in this stealthy fashion one recipient won Hale's good opinion by speaking up and warning:—

"You'd better be ready to use some of them guns you're carrying the minute you git outside, stranger."

"Thanks. I'll be ready," replied Hale. "I'm just waiting till the old man is taken out of range of any careless shooting."

He walked to the rear door and peered out. An immaculate figure, patent leather boots and all, was negligently leaning against a hitching-post at the junction of the street and the stage road. Hale must pass the gambler in returning to the stable. With the door ajar he studied the dapper figure for some moments, wondering how the gambler knew he was in the saloon and would be going back to the stable. It proved Patterson's tools had kept a sharp watch on him ever since his arrival in town.

He waited until Gorman and Old Idaho had passed the gambler and turned into the stage road; then he removed the key from the door and locked it behind him as he stepped into the street. They were all strangers to him in the bar-room, and the old fear of being struck down from behind forbade his taking any chances. With a backward glance to make sure no foe was hiding up the street he took the middle of the road and walked toward the gambler.

Down the stage road a bit Gorman had come to a halt and was waiting for the climax. Old Idaho seemed

well recovered, for he was standing erect without support. As Hale advanced Patterson leisurely straightened and brushed the black sleeve that had rested on the post. He wore no weapons in sight, and this fact puzzled Hale.

Patterson now began to walk toward Hale, moving slowly.

According to mining-camp ethics Hale was justified in shooting on sight because of the other's public vow to kill with the same lack of ceremony.

Faces filled the rear windows of the buildings on Hale's right. Across the street men peered around corners of houses, or took shelter behind rocks, all eagerly waiting for the duel to begin. Patterson's record as a street fighter was well known, and the fact he had passed through many such encounters proved his shrewdness and deadly marksmanship. Hale's reputation, distorted by gossip, was that of a bad man to cross.

In truth, Idaho City never saw the stage set for a more dramatic situation. And women's faces were not lacking from the different windows. Honest women bravely intent on making homes in this new land and their less fortunate sisters, who would never again know what home meant.

It was as if the entire town knew of the impending tragedy and had ceased its usual activities to play spectator. A silence filled the street, nor was there the usual confusion of sounds from the main street. By word of mouth it had been announced:—

“Patterson and Shoshoni Hale are meeting up!”

The two men drew closer together, neither making a move toward a weapon. The silence was first broken by a woman's hysterical voice screaming:—

“They'll kill each other!”

Onward the two walked, each looking straight ahead.

Then came the second interruption of the silence, a man crying from a store window:—

“ Behind you, Shoshoni ! ”

Hale would have taken it as a ruse had not the voice instantly added:—

“ Pinkham talking. For God’s sake—behind you ! ”

Hale twisted his head and glimpsed a furtive figure dropping behind an empty barrel. He faced about expecting to meet Patterson’s fire yet determined not to be the first to draw. He was amazed to behold the gambler had halted and was making no move to go after his gun.

“ Behind you, Shoshoni ! ” yelled Pinkham.

Hale spun about in time to behold a stockily built man resting on one knee and bringing a heavy navy revolver down to a level. With legerdemain seldom if ever witnessed in Idaho City before, Hale’s right-hand gun leaped from the holster and exploded a second ahead of the assassin’s weapon. The instant he fired he pivoted on his heel, his revolver half-raised, but Patterson had drawn no weapon. Even as Hale glared at him, bewildered that he should let such an opportunity pass, Patterson folded his arms across his white shirt. Then he faced down the street and walked away.

The street was silent no longer. Women screamed from upper windows. Men yelled hoarsely and swarmed into the road. From back doors, from around buildings, from behind rocks and mounds of earth they came, making much noise but saying nothing intelligible. Hale knew what was drawing them into the road. He remained staring after Patterson and slowly replaced his revolver.

Pinkham ran up to him and cried:—

“ You got him dead centre ! ”

“ I had to. Who was he ? ”

“ Sydney Bill ! ”

"But what does it all mean? I never saw the man. I never harmed him. Why did he lay for me like this?"

"It was a put-up job. They say now that Patterson hasn't a gun on him. The way my friends figure it out, and I agree with them, he wanted you to get word he was after you. He knew you wouldn't draw first, but that you'd be watching him mighty sharp. While you had your eye on him, Sydney Bill would drop you from behind and trust to the sheriff to get him clear."

"I can't see why Sydney Bill should dip into my game," persisted Hale.

"Orders from Updyke and his Boise City crowd," snapped Pinkham. "Here comes Bowen now. Hold your temper."

The sheriff, a tool of scoundrels, came running up from where the crowd was standing around the body of Sydney Bill. His first words were:—

"You're arrested for killing that man!"

"His arrest is merely a matter of form, of course," quietly said Pinkham.

"Merely a matter of form when he kills a man in the street of this town?" indignantly cried the sheriff.

"Bah!" jeered Pinkham. "He killed a scoundrel who was trying to murder him. The crowd saw it. Release him in my custody."

"Some of the crowd saw it different than you did, perhaps," growled the sheriff. "There are men here who say he shot that poor devil down without any cause."

"Then you'd better hustle back and hide his gun before any more citizens inspect it," advised Pinkham. "He certainly never fired it after he was hit. Of course there'll be a hearing. Release him in my custody."

"He's a friend of yours. You'd stand up for him no matter what he did," hotly accused the sheriff.

"I tried to pot that scoundrel from the window up

there. But he was on my side of the street and got out of range before I could shoot. He had his gun aimed at my friend and would have killed him if I hadn't shouted a warning."

"Pinkham, you keep out of this. Street fighting is going to stop in Idaho City."

"This particular fight is all over," said Hale. "I'm not aiming for any trouble. I'm under arrest for killing a murderous villain. I didn't know him from a Pawnee Indian, but I'm told he was a bad one with a record that reaches to Frisco."

"Australian convict. Got away from Frisco by the skin of his teeth," said Pinkham. "Do you mean to tell these citizens that you refuse to leave this man in my custody?"

Bowen hesitated, and glanced around the circle of grim faces. He was ever a weakling; and there were men watching him who, he knew, would stand by the former sheriff. Updyke of Boise City would have maintained the position first taken; Bowen lacked the stamina.

"All right," he sullenly surrendered. "But I'll hold you responsible."

"Take me down to the stable. I must see about my mare," Hale requested. "Then I want to talk with this man Patterson."

"Keep quiet. Don't make out that you're a man-eater," whispered Pinkham. "Most of these fellows here are my friends. Keep your mouth shut and you'll be all right."

The sheriff already had observed that his friends were in the minority. It was his wish to place Hale in the new thirteen-thousand dollar jail, but too many stern-faced men were speaking to him through Pinkham. With an attempt at official dignity the sheriff announced:—

"All we want is law and order. Every killing must be looked into. This man, who's said to live with Injuns, has shot down a stranger in our streets. If any one but Sumner Pinkham had asked me to let him go free until the hearing I'd have to refuse. But he can go and Pinkham will be responsible for his not leaving town till this killing's cleared up."

With that he strode back to the dead desperado. The circle about Hale began to disintegrate.

Pinkham said:—

"Well, that's settled. Of course you must stick here with me."

"I'll stick as long as you tell me," Hale moodily promised. "But I'd planned to ride down the Payette road with Old Idaho and his granddaughter. Of course I'm keen to git back north."

"You need something for your nerves. If I was quick as a wild-cat and as big as a hill I wouldn't turn my back on the worst gun-fighter living."

Hale smiled sardonically. He couldn't make his friend understand it wasn't physical fear that drove him to the friendly solitudes up north. Nor could he explain it to himself except to say he was "scared," which permitted of misinterpretation. In a vague fashion he knew his fear was based on the shock he had received when a boy of sixteen. Many times in his dreams he had lived through that terrible tragedy and the impress it had left on his mind was not to be shaken off because he was twenty-two instead of sixteen. But he did believe that once he could identify those inexorable men who had trailed him with such savage persistency he could meet his destiny with a quiet mind and a quick hand. But the thought that his murderers might be found in any group of strangers eroded his nerve force. He felt as if he were being trailed by ghosts.

The two friends met Jack Gorman shortly after turning into the stage road.

"I saw it all," congratulated Gorman, wringing Hale's hand. "I knew Pink was on the spot and that you'd have fair play, or I'd have quit the old feller and come a-shooting. That old cuss is queer. You turned him over to me wobbly drunk, and I delivered him over to the little girl sober. Say, Shoshoni, she's a jim-dandy! About big enough to be a kid brother. She knocked me clean over. And in buckskin! No bigger'n a quart of cherries. And so used to that rig that I reckon she don't feel natural in petticoats. No law a'gin me riding down the valley road to their shack some day, is there, Shoshoni? Or is it your discovery claim?"

"I haven't any claim there, Jack," Hale morosely replied. "My affairs ain't yet in shape to go prospecting around for any young women. But, Jack, if you hit the valley road don't ask me to wish you luck. Are they still at the stable?"

"Old man couldn't git away fast enough. The kid sorter held back, but he made her ride."

"Then there's no need of my going there just now. I want to see this Patterson. Let's go to the Gold Dust."

"All you need is just to kill one more man to get into a noose," remonstrated Pinkham. "Better go to my room and take it easy."

"He ain't done nothing to make him hide from that card sharp," muttered Gorman. "Time he had a show down with that gambler. Time he had a talk with him. If Patterson is making a war smoke it's time Shoshoni was reading his signals. If he has crawled then Shoshoni won't be digging up a gun when it ain't necessary."

Pinkham did not relish the idea of the two men meeting. On the other hand he understood how Hale might be charged with cowardice if he went into hiding.

"All right," he finally agreed. "We'll look him up just to show folks we ain't scared of him. But no abuse, no fighting talk."

Their entrance to the Gold Dust saloon created a sensation. The patrons crowded against the walls and left a wide aisle the full length of the bar-room. Patterson was not in sight, but the behaviour of the company told the three men he was close at hand. Leaning across the bar, Pinkham informed the frightened bartender, "We want to see Patterson a minute. Tell him he needn't come with his hands on his guns unless he's hunting trouble. My friend won't draw unless he does."

The bartender hurried into the back room, where the games were run at night, and returned in a few moments with Patterson walking behind him. The gambler used the bartender as a cover until nearly up to the trio. Then he stepped one side and eyed them impassively.

"My friend, Shoshoni Hale, got your war-talk, Patterson," began the former sheriff. "When he found you stalking him on the back street he expected gun play. The way you acted is clean beyond his *sabe*."

"I'm not responsible for any war talk that's peddled around this town," calmly replied the gambler. "I was trailing a man who was in my place last night and lost and won some gold dust. The dust he won was the pure quill. The dust he lost wasn't worth a damn. Counterfeit. The meeting with Hale was an accident. I knew our names had been hitched together. When I saw him coming I couldn't turn and run. I had no weapons except a small derringer. Now you've called in here and sent for me to come out and meet you. What's the word?"

"Only to know if it's a case of shoot when we next meet," Hale informed. "I've been told that you've

made threats against me, and have said you were afraid of me and would shoot in self-defence when you met me. You played that trick in the stable at Boise City. While you were pulling your gun you yelled for 'help,' and said you was 'afraid' of me. And all the time I hadn't made a move. The yarn sounded likely and I believed it. So I reckoned I'd talk with you before these men and find out just what to expect."

" You gun-fighters are always looking for a chance to show how smart you are," sneered Patterson. " Yanking out a gun before a man of peace can get started is the one thing you like to do. As for being afraid of you I say right now I *am* afraid of you. Just as I'm afraid of an Indian who gets behind me. As for the next time we meet I shan't move to draw unless you do. Of course that gives you an advantage, as I'm not a gunman."

Hale chuckled, genuinely amused for the first time since Lucky Tom's death.

" In a way, Patterson, you're all right," he grudgingly admitted. " Some may think it's a blamed poor way ; but it's your way, and you're all right. I'll tell you and all men here that you have nothing to fear from me unless you try to murder me. I'll never dig for my belt until after you've started to draw. I'll give you that much of a start so there won't be any talk among your friends. I'm not going to ask you about your friend Sydney Bill——"

" Never a friend of mine. He was a low dog. I'm glad you killed him," fiercely broke in Patterson.

" Well, I'm not going to talk about him, although there are men who are mighty curious to learn how he knew I'd be walking down that street, my eyes fastened on you. I'll only say this, that if ever you try to draw on me I'll get you. I won't run much risk in letting you git your gun clear before I begin operating.

It's mighty queer the man I shot should happen to jump me while you was holding my attention at the end of the street. Probably he was the man you were looking for, the fellow who swapped bad dust for good."

Patterson smiled and shook his head and softly answered :—

" No ; he wasn't the man. The man I was after once had a dog shot near his home. I'm sending word for him to come and see me and fix things up so he won't get into trouble."

Hale's thin face remained as non-committal as an Indian's, but Patterson knew he understood by watching his eyes. Patterson was charging Old Idaho with counterfeiting gold dust. The accusation was grotesque. Yet there was a deadly quality in the man, a subtle evil which might carry him far in his designs. Hale realised all this and it troubled him hugely. Apparently none of the spectators had the remotest idea as to whom the gambler was referring.

" I'm not interested in your losses," said Hale. " But I advise you to take your pay in dust when you come to a settlement."

" Thank you for nothing," said Patterson with a smile and polite bow. " Now if you gentlemen haven't anything more to say I'll go back to my room and get a little sleep.

Suddenly Hale's worry was doubled. " See here, Patterson, I want a word with you aside. Perhaps we can come to a clearer understanding of several things."

The gambler cast a quick glance up and down the long room. He had too many friends there for Hale to attempt any violence. Also, he believed, Hale was troubled. Stepping down the bar and motioning the bartender to withdraw, he waited for Hale to join him. With a gesture for Gorman and Pinkham to stay back Hale approached the gambler and murmured :—

" You meant Old Idaho. I know about you shooting the dog you gave his girl. You're crazy to think you can work anything like that."

" Those are all your words," was the quiet rejoinder.
" But what if I can prove it ? "

" You can't prove it by honest men," said Hale.
" I wanted to tell you this much ; you bother the girl and you'll answer to me ; and I won't be over-fussy in letting you have much advantage on the draw."

Patterson was facing the bar, his profile to Hale, but the plate-glass mirror on the wall revealed his triumphant smile. The gambler replied :—

" All depending, of course, if you're at liberty to chip in."

" Meaning Sydney Bill. I'll lose no liberty over him."

" I wasn't thinking of Bill. He needed killing bad. I was wondering if something else might not turn up."

" Such as what ? " taunted Hale.

" Oh, it's none of my game. I ain't even looking on, let alone taking cards. What's coming to you will be because of *you* and not of me."

" Such as what ? " smilingly persisted Hale, now sensing a trap.

" Lord bless you ! How should I know ? But for example—just for an example—say the trouble starts for you over a horse."

Hale laughed softly and felt much relieved.

" The Boise City judge is a rascal, but even he gave me a clean bill of health. Gorman and Pinkham both will identify me and the mare."

" I didn't say ' mare.' I said a ' horse,' " corrected Patterson, turning from the bar.

And with a mocking smile for Hale, and a bow for Pinkham and Gorman, he retired to the rear of the building where he had a room off the gambling hall.

" How much good did your talk do you ? " grumbled

Pinkham. "You look like you'd drawn cards on his deal."

"Get outside," said Hale.

Once they were on the street Hale led the way to the entrance of the Jenny Lind Theatre where there were no loungers to spy on their talk, and repeated what the gambler had said.

"He's a cheap dog!" hotly declared Pinkham.
"He's trying to bluff you."

"I've only seen the girl twice. I don't want any trouble to come to her," said Hale. "She's alone in the world except for her grandfather. Patterson went down there and tried to steal her and the old man ran him off. Of course if he could git the old man out of the way if only for a few days, or if he could scare him with his threats it would be bad for the girl."

"But he can't!" exploded Gorman, and adding a round oath for good measure. "Let him try it and if you ain't on hand I'll chip in."

Pinkham sighed regretfully and said:—

"Wish Patterson had made a move this morning so you could have drilled him! He's up to some sort of hell. Old Idaho hasn't enough brains to pass any counterfeit dust. That's all bosh. The old man probably does a little placer mining on the side and picks up a few ounces. But his diggings, wherever they are, can't be fat enough to tempt a Chinaman to pay his six dollars a month tax. And yet, if he starts he'll be going after something. He isn't a fool."

Gorman wrinkled his nose thoughtfully and announced:—

"The point that worries me the most is his talk about getting Hale into trouble. About a horse. A horse! Say, Shoshoni, shake your brains and see if there's ever been any time when you had a run-in over a horse."

"Never! Some one stole my mare and I got her back."

"It's all foolishness. He's trying to scare you," declared Pinkham.

They talked further and arrived nowhere. Hale announced a desire to visit the stable and see that his mare was all right. Gorman offered to accompany him, Pinkham had business to attend to, and explained, "I've promised to meet a man at the warm springs. I'll be back some time to-morrow. Stay with Gorman Shoshoni, and if Bowen tries anything funny send out word by one of the boys. If Ben Ripley comes to town tell him I want to see him at once."

After calling at the stable the two wandered into the hills back of the town and used up the afternoon. Returning to Gorman's room they decided to take in the theatre. They had eaten their supper and were strolling toward the Forest Theatre when a stranger to Hale hurriedly called Gorman one side and whispered at some length.

Gorman rejoined Hale and informed him :

"My friend says Lucky Tom's horse has been found on the stage road and that it's being said he's been murdered. They know when Tom left Boise City and have traced him, they think, to within ten miles of here. Men are now out searching both sides of the road."

Hale felt his heart contracting. He had told Gorman nothing about the miner's death. He would have given much could Pinkham have been present to advise him. More deliberate meditation allowed him to minimise his fears. Of course the miner's horse would be found. He had known that from the first. Perhaps he had taken it for granted the animal would be picked up by passing wagon or pack-train and quietly appropriated. It was not until they were entering the theatre and he was weighing the advisability of inflicting this fresh trouble on Gorman that he realised the possibility of

Lucky Tom's disappearance coming to the ears of his unknown enemies through the finding of the horse. If the miner's grave were found—and Hale had made no attempt to conceal it—then the murderers would learn of their error.

He whispered to Gorman five minutes after they had taken their seats :

" Let's git out of here where we can breathe. I've something to tell you."

Gorman led the way from the theatre without a word and turned toward the outskirts of the town. Hale told him all he had told Pinkham. Gorman was bewildered. So far as the horse was concerned he did not believe there was anything to fear.

" It's too much for my poor brains," he admitted. " Pinkham will be back to-morrow. I'll send a boy to him in the morning. Let him wrestle with it. No one knows you camped with Tom."

They turned back to the centre of the town. The streets were always lively at night, but the stir and bustle into which Hale and his friend walked was caused by something outside routine happenings. A mob of men and a score of women were standing, strangely silent, before the Gold Dust Saloon. Farther down the street was another group listening to a violent harangue by a man on a box. A hoarse roar greeted his speech. This display of violent emotion was in marked contrast to the ominous silence of the gathering before the saloon. Each seemed to be a distant locus of interest.

" Let's find out what has happened. It's something unusual," said Gorman.

" Wait," restrained Hale, seizing his friend by the arm. " Hope I'm wrong, but I feel it has to do with me in some shape. I won't walk into it blind."

" I see a man coming who will know. Stay here and I'll learn the truth," exclaimed Gorman.

He darted down the street and for a few moments was lost to view. Then he reappeared in the lights shining from Vantine's store. The man he met, and who was drawing close to the store window to escape the jostling throng, was undersized and slight of physique. As the light struck his face Hale instinctively drew back to the corner of the building. He saw Gorman stagger backward as if struck in the face. The little man resumed his way, walking with mincing steps. Gorman followed behind him. Hale hugged the wall until the little man had passed by. Gorman was breathless with excitement. Without a word he took Hale by the arm and led him into the gloom of a back street.

"Hell's to pay!" he gasped. "Ben Riply says they've found Lucky Tom's body and that folks are saying that you killed him!"

"Who told them? The names?" hungrily cried Hale.

"Riply doesn't know. A letter was left at the express office for him. There wasn't any name signed. Left by some one who knows his work with the Payette Committee takes him into the express offices every day."

"My luck's against me. Why, Jack, if I could know who left that writing I could point out one of the murderers. I'd be knowing one of the men who's dogged my steps."

"You must get clear of town before morning. Get your mare and ride for it before they think to watch the stable and lay for you. I know you're all right, Shoshoni, and Pinkham's word will satisfy men like Riply. But Pinkham isn't here and you must dig out."

"I promised to stick here. I was left in Pinkham's custody. I won't run."

"Then we must keep out of sight until Pinkham gets back. We'd best go to my room and take it easy."

But Hale was opposed to the suggestion and insisted :—

“ I can’t be cooped up in a room. We’ll stay outside.”

“ They got his horse and they found his body,” muttered Gorman. “ Riply said he hadn’t told any one about the writing, and yet that feller on the box down the street has used your name and is calling on the mob to find and hang you. Riply’s trying to get some of the decent men together to prevent any mob hanging till all the facts are known. Wish Pinkham would come ! ”

“ And there was the crowd in front of the Gold Dust Saloon.”

“ I asked Riply, but he hadn’t been there and didn’t know what it meant. Probably another crowd talking over Lucky Tom’s death.”

“ No one seemed to be talking. Every one seemed to be mighty quiet,” mused Hale.

“ That’s a bad sign for the fellow they get after,” said Gorman uneasily. “ Being let loose in Pinkham’s charge didn’t mean you was to stay here and be hung while he’s out of town. I have it. Get your mare and ride out to the springs. Then you’ll be out of town and still in his charge.”

This appealed to Hale as being sensible and he allowed Gorman to lead the way toward the stable on the stage road. All the excitement seemed to be radiating from Main Street, and the two friends were following along Wall. What men and women they met were in a hurry to reach the centre of the scene and gave them no heed. As they passed an opening between the express office and a store they could look on to the lighted thoroughfare, and it was a most dramatic spectacle. Men were marching and counter-marching four abreast and in a rude chorus were shouting :—

"Lynch him! String him up!"

There seemed to be two distinct parades of would-be executioners.

"Hell! They're sure after you, Shoshoni! Divided into two bands to make certain!" hoarsely whispered Gorman. "Riply's changed his mind and rounded-up the citizens. T'other band is made up of scum."

"I won't be hung by either vigilants or a mob," snarled Hale. "I'll ride for the mountains. Tell Pinkham why I had to light out. When it quiets down I'll return and face the music."

A man ran through the opening and fairly into Gorman's arms. He was puffing violently. As Gorman pushed him back he gave a snort of disgust and growled:—

"Never thought to get so close to you, Three-Spot. What do you mean, you drunken thief, by running into me like that?"

"Lem'me go! Lem'me go!" the fellow fairly howled. "They're going to hang him! I can't see 'em do it! They're going to snake him out of the Gold Dust and crack his neck!"

"Whose neck? Who's at the Gold Dust?" growled Gorman, seizing the man by the throat and choking him.

Hale released his friend's hands and patted the derelict on the back until he recovered his breath. Then he quietly said:—

"Now tell us about it. Then you can go. Who's at the Gold Dust waiting to be hung?"

"Ferd Patterson!" faintly whispered Three-Spot.

Gorman and Hale were too dumbfounded to speak. Three-Spot added:—

"You know he killed Sumner Pinkham out at the springs a few hours ago?"

CHAPTER V

FLIGHT

IDAHO CITY knew no rest that night. The killing of Pinkham, a purely political murder, overshadowed the death of Lucky Tom for the time, and the latter homicide in turn distracted attention from the charge now made public by Patterson that Old Idaho was responsible for the bogus gold dust dumped into stores, saloons and gambling places. Any of the three matters, taken alone, would have been quickly and ruthlessly investigated by the citizen body. Pinkham's death, however, took precedence. According to impartial eye-witnesses, Patterson arrived at the springs and inquired for Pinkham. Coming upon him suddenly he was further charged with taking the initiative by rushing forward as if to attack and at the same time making threatening gestures. Pinkham, not expecting any trouble, was slow in attempting to reach for a weapon and was instantly shot dead.

The temper of the decent element clamoured for immediate justice and for an hour or two it did appear as if the gambler would be hanged. But Patterson had foreseen this righteous indignation and promptly surrendered to the authorities and demanded protection, claiming the killing was in self-defence. The roughs of the town, including all those who belonged to the organised band of law-breakers, shouted hoarsely in defence of the slayer and began pushing forward witnesses who would swear the former sheriff was the

aggressor. Added to such efforts was the undercurrent of vicious threats to burn the town if the prisoner were harmed.

C. S. Kingley, a Methodist minister, called a meeting of honest citizens in an underground warehouse and sounded public opinion as to what should be done to stem the tide of ruthless violence. Fifty representative men were there and were soon joined by Ben Riply. Riply, as the mouthpiece for the very effective Payette Committee, gave some excellent advice and urged against anything smacking of mob violence.

While known to be inexorable in demanding the punishment of evil-doers he was the first to advise that the case be permitted to go to trial. Riply was a shrewd fellow and his purpose in counselling this moderation may have disappointed the more hot-headed of the citizens, but it served a double purpose; it gave time for reflection and orderly procedure, always most impressive in citizens' tribunals, and it would reveal how far the sheriff and his tools were inclined to support law and order and how thorough the courts could be in measuring out justice.

While this grave deliberation was occupying the attention of Idaho City's honest men Shoshoni Hale was riding his swift mare over the mountain road to Centerville. He passed through the town in the darkness without stopping and continued along the road to Placerville. Entering the Payette River Valley road, he crossed the river shortly after midnight and would have made for the foothills of the Saw Tooth range if not for the need of warning Old Idaho of Patterson's accusation.

When he, accompanied by Gorman, went to the stable to get his rifle and mare, the stable-keeper had heard nothing of Pinkham's death but was very deeply incensed at Old Idaho for passing worthless dust.

Now as he followed the empty road, lighted vaguely by the brilliant heavens, he found time to assemble various facts and to analyse the total result. He was compelled to respect the astuteness of the gambler. In comparison Shoshoni Hale was a child, he told himself. Now he knew what Patterson had meant when speaking of trouble starting over a horse. The gambler was one of the first to know that Lucky Tom's horse had been found and was being brought to Idaho City.

But to use it in his veiled threat he also must have been informed of Hale's presence in the miner's camp. Only Lucky Tom's murderers could have told him that. It followed that he also was aware of the death of the miner and that the body would be produced. Hale firmly believed the gambler wrote the unsigned message which was left at the express office for Ben Ripley.

In brief, Patterson must be in alliance with Hale's secret enemies. The killing of Sydney Bill could not be utilised for Hale's undoing so long as Sumner Pinkham lived. Pinkham was accordingly put out of the way. Hale stood between Patterson and "Harry" Idaho, as the Prescott girl was commonly called. The elimination of Pinkham threw Hale on to his own resources, and Hale was not on his own stamping grounds.

Hale's flight would leave the girl depending upon her grandfather for protection. The gambler already owed the old man a grudge for running him out of the valley. The charge of counterfeiting would remove Old Idaho from the gambler's path. Shoshoni Hale slowly summed it up to the accompaniment of his horse's flying hoofs :—

"Pinkham dead. Me hung for Tom's death, or running away. Idaho jailed. Girl alone. He's the true son of the devil!"

Hale was direct in his thinking and acting. Such duplicity astounded him. His life was composed of dangers and hardships, but never had he come in

contact with a man so subtly evil. So while Patterson was given the best room in the new jail, and was waited upon by a guard who was his admirer and willing tool, and held a little court for the procession of his friends and associates, and lavishly supplied with the best food and drink obtainable, the tall road builder was fleeing to find a place where he could outline his own campaign.

From what Gorman profanely told him while they made for the stable he inferred the gambler would suffer none at the hands of the law. His perjured witnesses would testify Pinkham attacked first. It might be the vigilants would take the case into their own hands but each day of delay lessened that possibility.

Hale was shrewd of wit enough to know that while the night would be spent in exhausting the thrills emanating from the Pinkham murder the first light of morning would reveal the result of the prisoner's conference with his friends. There would be much clamour over Lucky Tom's death, which would gradually rival the Pinkham homicide as a popular topic. The charge against Old Idaho would steadily demand recognition and result in obtaining it. For while the murder of Pinkham would horrify and enrage all decent men, the passing of bogus dust was a crime that threatened the prosperity of the evil as well as the good.

It was two o'clock in the morning of the new day when Hale left his mare back of the cottonwoods and made for the double cabin. He rapped sharply on the door and heard the gun barrel scrape as it was thrust through the loophole.

"Who be you? Give your business. I'm about ready to fire," called out Old Idaho's voice.

"Shoshoni Hale. It's your business more'n mine. Put up that gun and open the door."

"I'll open my door to no man this time of night. Git out or I'll shoot."

"Don't be a fool. I'm out of range. I tell you to open the door and let me in, or else come out here. It concerns you, not me."

"I know his voice, granddaddy," Hale heard the girl call out. "Open the door and have him in."

"Git back to bed, you young fool," growled the old man. Then to Hale: "Wait a minute. You must be crazy to come round here rousing me out at this hour."

Hale sat down on the log that served as a doorstep, his rifle across his knees. After some minutes the door opened and Old Idaho stepped out and fiercely demanded:—

"Now what does this mean?"

"Let's walk down to the river so the girl can't hear," whispered Hale.

"Not by a derned sight! What's your game? You was to ride down here with us, Harry said. Then you got into some kind of trouble and couldn't come. I don't want to mix up with any one that's having trouble in Idaho City. You won't git me away from my house to-night. And remember I have a weapon in my hand."

Hale turned it over in his mind and decided that it would be impossible to keep the absurd charge from the girl. He quietly replied:—

"It's best to talk here. They've started the story in Idaho City that you've been passing counterfeit gold dust——"

"What!" shrilly screamed the old man. "Me? Of all the dod-rotted lies——"

"Oh, I don't believe it," impatiently broke in Hale. "If it wasn't for the fact that the skunks up there seem to be running the town I wouldn't have bothered to wake you up. I've got troubles enough of my own to

keep me busy and on the hoof. Sumner Pinkham, my friend, was killed by Ferd Patterson yesterday——”

“ Oh, Lord ! ”

“ And the devil to pay in general.” Then with a bitter laugh : “ They’re after me, too. They tried to make out I murdered Sydney Bill, who was trying to shoot me in the back. Pinkham stepped on that and now they charge me with killing Lucky Tom, a miner who struck it rich somewhere. The killing of Sydney Bill doesn’t worry me any as too many men saw how it happened. But the other charge isn’t one I care to face until honest men git hold of the reins in Idaho City. If Pinkham was alive I wouldn’t worry any. He understood the truth. So does Jack Gorman. But I had to have Pinkham behind to be sure of a square deal. So I ran for it. If you’re wise you’ll do the same. It’s all a game of Patterson’s to git me out of the way. If you can send the girl to some friends, where she’ll be safe, why, then you’d best stick here.”

“ Ain’t got no friends I can send her to,” the old man said in a quavering voice, and Hale heard his teeth clicking with fear.

“ I have friends in Lewiston she could go to. Their women folks——”

“ But we’d have to go with her. We’d be overtook afore we could make it,” complained the old man, his voice trembling.

There came a swift patter of small moccasins and the girl, fully dressed in her buckskin trousers and boy’s blouse, stepped through the doorway and stood between them. She quietly informed them :—

“ I’ve heard all that you two have said. My grandfather doesn’t run because a murdering gambler tells lies about him.”

“ Well, there’s a lot hoss sense in that,” admitted Hale, beginning to believe he had measured the old

man's danger from the wrong view-point. "Reckon I was thinking more and fearing more that you'd be left alone."

"It's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of!" she passionately exclaimed. "It's bad enough for you to run away. But are honest people to dig to cover every time a liar tells wrong stories about them? If my granddaddy was as young as you he'd go up there and make them eat their lying words." Her indignation was superb. "How can this gambler kill a good man like Sumner Pinkham and still have power to harm innocent people?"

"His friends run the town. The sheriff is his friend. If the honest men don't take him out and hang him he'll go into court and be acquitted. Meanwhile his friends will carry out his orders. He planned Pinkham's death in cold blood. He knew he must surrender to the sheriff to escape lynching. He'd figured it all out."

"But surely there's enough men in Idaho City to see my granddaddy doesn't come to any hurt," she protested.

Hale felt very sheepish for having brought such a story to the cabin. It was almost as bad as if he had accused the girl's grandfather of the crime.

"Reckon you're right, Miss Harry," he capitulated. "You must be always right. I can't figure out how you'd ever be wrong. It ain't possible. I got over excited because I knew it was one of Patterson's plans; and he's the very devil for thinking up mischief, Miss Harry. He fixed it so I had to clear out and stay out till sure of a fair hearing."

Old Idaho surprised them by tremulously announcing:

"We must clear out, Harry. They'll rig up some devil's game to hang me. When they're mad they'd just as soon hang a innocent man as a guilty one. You

hustle inside and make up your pack. We'll dig right out."

For a few moments the girl was too astounded to speak. When she could find her tongue she cried:—

" See what your wild story has done, Shoshoni Hale ! Have you lost your senses, granddaddy ? Where can we go to ? "

Old Idaho fumbled around in his mind for some sane reply and finally spoke of Umatilla and the coast.

" But that would mean to leave your home for good," they cried, aghast.

" Well, where would we go to at this time of night, with no warning, nor nothing ? " he querulously demanded.

Hale spoke up, saying:—

" I don't urge the plan I had in mind when coming here. I'm just talking, that's all. But I'm going to hide up not very far from here. It's a place that no man's visited yet except one. That one man's dead. If you two want to go along with me you're welcome. You'll have to rough it a bit, I reckon ; but you'd be within striking distance of your home and I'm sure you could find enough gold to pay for what crops you might lose."

" Gold ! " Old Idaho exclaimed in a husky whisper.

" Honest, innocent people don't run away ! " insisted the girl.

" I'm innocent. I sure am running," was Hale's grim reply.

" Oh, if I was a man ! " she cried.

" Exactly," said Hale gravely. " If you was a man, Miss Harry, you'd be a caution. You'd stay and fight it out. That's what you mean, isn't it ? "

Her bobbing head shut out the light of a blazing star as she nodded an affirmative. But as for that

phenomenon her curly head was shutting out all the world from Shoshoni Hale's consciousness. He apologetically continued :—

" Of course you would, Miss Harry. And you're asking yourself why I don't try that same trick. I'd have stayed if by doing so I could git a chance to fight. That's all I ask, a fair fight, or a fight that's somewhere near fair. But even Jack Gorman—and no one ever calls him a coward—wouldn't listen to anything except that I ride for it. And, well, Miss Harry, not to put too fine a point to it, I ain't too high-spirited to show my heels when it comes to being done to death without having nary a show."

She was impressed by his honest speech and did not answer at once. Then she said :—

" Where is this place you'd take us to ? "

" In a lost gulch, twenty miles across the river. I've never been there."

" How do you know there is such a place ? " she curiously asked.

" Reckon you don't trust me," he mournfully remarked. " Don't know as I blame you. It's where a miner, Lucky Tom, got his dust. He's dead. He gave the diggings to me. No one ever tracked him to the gulch. So I reckon no one but him has been there. He gave me a map of the place."

Old Idaho underwent a startling metamorphosis. He grabbed at Hale's arm as if fearing he would run away. In a half-strangled voice in which exultation and anger were strangely mingled he cried :—

" Lucky Tom's diggings ! Hell ! It's what I've been looking for, searching for, dreaming of, praying for ! Go ? Of course we'll go. All Boise County can't stop me ! Good heavens above ! That gulch by discovery belongs to me ! Harry, do up a bundle. A small one ! We'll need our packs for powder'n such like. Oh,

law ! To think there ain't no need of the other thing no more ! ”

“ Granddaddy ! You're acting beside yourself,” anxiously cried the girl. “ To leave our home—in the night ! To run away and hide like thieves ! We can't do it ! ”

“ Harry, you keep shet,” his panting voice commanded. “ It's my one chance. The chance I've hankered for. The chance that fetched me back to this place.” Then in a low whisper, “ As for what they say I did I might have trouble proving that I didn't.”

“ That gang will swear that you put out the bogus dust,” agreed Hale. “ They'd swear a man's life away for an ounce of dust.”

“ And if we run away they'd make some folks believe it was true,” the girl spiritedly insisted.

Hale could not refute the logic of this remonstrance.

“ I reckon Miss Harry has the right of it, Idaho. Yes, she's got the right of it. All I've been thinking about was how that snake of a Patterson would bedevil her if you was locked up and she was alone. That's what was worrying me. I didn't have brains enough to see that if you run you'd be giving colour for 'em to pan out.”

“ As for Patterson, or any one else, I can stand them off,” the girl scornfully informed. “ I haven't learned to shoot hand guns and my new Henry rifle for nothing.”

Old Idaho seemed to fall into a frenzy. He began yelling :—

“ But I done it ! I tell you I done all they say I did and more ! I got rid of twenty ounces up to Idaho City. I gambled and took my winnings in real dust. My losses was paid with t'other kind. I've hunted for years for my gulch and never could find it. I knew it was near here ; but I couldn't find it. It's made me

about crazy to know it was close, and yet hid from me same's the mountains are hid by the haze. That's why I made my vegetable farm here. It got on my mind till I couldn't sleep. It made me mad to see other men stumbling on to places that was fortunes, and me not able to find what I'd once tramped over in searching for the lost cattle. It riled me so I got the notion of thinking it wouldn't be very wrong to put out some spelter. I knew the time must come when I could make it all up by handing over genuine dust. I knew other men were doing it—and—and it wouldn't do a bit of harm if the danged fools would keep the make-believe dust a-moving. It's as good as the real article till some one begins to hoot. That proves it wasn't wrong so long as it kept moving. It shows the man who hoots and makes it worth nothing is the one to blame; not me."

This amazing confession left the girl holding her breath. Hale had listened with mouth agape.

"You're making all that up out of whole cloth, granddaddy," whispered the girl when she could speak.

"No! No! No! It's true! We must dig out!" he eagerly replied. "I got so I was losing my wits when I'd go out to find the gulch, could see in my mind just where it was, and then have to come back empty-handed. Git your bundle ready, Harry. I'll clean up something proper and you shall be a lady."

Hale was powerless to express an opinion. It had never entered his imagination to believe Patterson's accusation. He felt a hysterical desire to laugh, to shout, as he recalled how preposterous the gambler's statements had sounded. Nor would he have believed it now if not for the old man's pitiable reasoning that counterfeiting was no offence so long as the bogus article was kept in circulation. The girl slipped on her

knees beside him and, resting a hand on his bowed shoulder, pleaded :—

“ Tell me you don’t believe it. He could never make me believe it. He’s saying it to make me go with him. He’s old and forgets things. He’s always been half-crazy to find his Lost Diggings, as he calls them, so he could find dust for me. He isn’t selfish. He never did that other thing.”

Hale timidly took her small hand and solemnly assured :—

“ Great snakes, Miss Harry ! Any one could see that.”

“ You were so still, so silent——”

“ But what’s the use of talking when a man knows you know he’s talking bosh. I’m just disgusted with him, that’s all.”

“ I done it, Shoshoni Hale,” fiercely insisted the old man. “ And I still hold it was good as the real article if every man would pass it along.”

“ Granddaddy, you’ve told enough things. You keep quiet. You’ve disgraced us.”

“ I done it, and I’ll go to Idaho City and tell ‘em all that I done it, and that no one can be a loser if they’ll just keep passing it along,” persisted Idaho.

Withdrawing her hand from Hale’s the girl disconsolately sighed, “ What’s the use ! He won’t be himself so long as he’s thinking of this gulch you’ve talked of. Why did you have to mention it ? ”

“ Too late to worry of that now,” said Hale. “ Let’s go to this hiding place, Miss Harry. If we don’t he’ll be blabbing fool-talk up and down the valley and there’s men who’ll be glad to take him at his word.”

“ I hate running away ! If it was only me concerned. Do you think it’s wise for us to leave home and go with you, Shoshoni Hale ? ”

“ Yes, Miss Harry. It’s best. Take your new rifle

and some extra blankets. The gulch is sheltered, I reckon ; but the nights are bound to be cold. Better pack up some grub, too, although there ought to be game once we git settled and find it's safe to shoot it. Lord ! I was forgetting. I've got a friend camped back north of here and I must fetch him along——”

“ No strangers can go into that gulch ! ” wildly protested the old man.

“ This one is an Indian. A Shoshoni. He's a friend of mine. He'll come in handy. He won't ask for any gold as he knows he's welcome to all of mine. You've talked enough, Idaho. You and Miss Harry cross the river and follow up-stream for ten miles. Then turn south-east and make a camp. I'll soon overtake you. My friend will pick up your trail all right if you leave it sort of promiscuous in spots.”

“ But if you're killed we couldn't ever find the gulch,” complained Old Idaho.

“ Oh, granddaddy ! ” rebuked the girl.

“ He's right,” agreed Hale. “ Here ! It's marked down on this paper. Reckon I don't need it. I've looked at it enough to remember everything. But Miss Harry must carry it. It mustn't be shown to any one.”

“ Small chance of our showing it,” the girl disconsolately assured.

Hale had in mind the event of Old Idaho's capture by any man from Idaho City. He did not try to explain this, but cautioned :—

“ Be sure there's no one in sight when you enter. The mouth of the gulch is blocked by a landslide, but close to the wall is a narrow opening. It's masked by grape-vines. You can lead the horses in without any trouble. Now I must be off, and good luck.”

He was walking back to his horse when the girl overtook him and, touching his arm, tearfully pleaded :—

" You don't believe what he said ? That he ever did such things ? "

" Great snakes ! Do you think I'm crazy," he scoffed. " Of course I don't. No sane man would. But there's sane men in Idaho City who'd be glad to pretend they believed it."

" I knew you didn't. And yet—well, it makes me feel better to hear you tell me so. It made me feel queer to hear him say it."

" He's talking bosh, Miss Harry. He's along in years and ain't responsible. Make up your pack and light out. You won't meet no one at this time of night."

He hurried to his horse, anxious for once to leave her. He could not endure further questioning and more falsehoods on his own part. But now Old Idaho pursued him and called on him to halt.

" You'll keep shet about what I said," began the old man in a low voice. " Mebbe it ain't so bad as I've pictered it. Mebbe I wanted to make the little girl go without any fuss. Mebbe——"

" And maybe you're guilty as hell," snarled Hale. " But don't tell the truth about it any more, or I'll turn you over to the vigilants."

With a squawk of fear Old Idaho retreated to the cabin. Hale looked back before riding through the cottonwoods and saw the girl's slight figure by the light of a candle. She was busy with making up the packs. By this time Hale was as thoroughly convinced of Old Idaho's guilt as originally he had believed the charge was preposterous. But the girl must never know the old man was guilty, nor ever suspect that Shoshoni Hale for a moment believed in his guilt.

He rode due north through the sage until he had covered five miles, Pinaquana picking her path through the clumps without hesitation. Hale kept up a low monologue to the mare, and she occasionally answered

him by trying to nibble at his feet. When he drew rein he was at the foot of a long ridge densely timbered with pine and yellow fir. Dismounting, he entered the growth with the mare at his heels. He felt the ground out with his moccasined feet until he found the overflow from a spring. Then he raised his voice in the long howl of a wolf. After waiting for a count of five he repeated the signal. It was answered from up the ridge. Hale removed the saddle and allowed the mare to nose about in the darkness. After a while a low bird note sounded close by. Hale returned it, and the next moment felt the presence of his friend.

CHAPTER VI

DREAMS AND THE AWAKENING

BLACK CLOUD, Hale's Indian friend, did not belong to the Shoshoni band living in Idaho. He came from the Shoshoni band beyond the Rockies and was proud of his caste as a "horse and buffalo" Indian. Undoubtedly he felt a contempt for the grass-house people who lived on rabbits, roots, nuts and fish, and who in the earlier days had been called "*shoshokos*," or "walkers," because of their lack in horses. Black Cloud had lived in a teepee and naturally scorned the brush shelters of his kinsmen in the sage-brush country.

His crossing the mountains and his lonely life in the foot-hills of the Bitter Root range was a continuous tragedy. He had been good to look upon, said the women of his people; his reputation as a fighting-man was envied by many a warrior of the most warlike of the western tribes. He owned many ponies, and although not a chief was accepted as a leader in foray or defensive warfare. In tribal affairs his voice was eagerly listened to; in war he was an example for all ambitious young men.

This before he crossed the mountains. Since coming to the Bitter Root range he had been the last person an Indian would envy.

He had lost his medicine.

He wandered about as one damned, with no thought of material gains. He had lost the medicine which alone could bring him favours from his tutelary deity.

There are many medicines to be had. Some are found, some are secured by trade, some are gifts. There is no hesitancy in discarding a weak medicine or one that once was strong but is no longer potent. There are medicines for trapping and medicines for war. There are grass-root medicines for the cure of the sick and wounded; these are the common property of a tribe. But the medicine Black Cloud had lost was a magic medicine which offset the evil influence of spirits, turned aside the malignant attacks of mythic animals and made futile all efforts put forth by sorcerers in the flesh.

The lost medicine was something he had carried upon his person, a fetish, the symbol and badge of the supernatural power that ever moved at his side, more constant in attendance than his shadow. And no man, not even his white friend, knew the nature of that fetish, or what particular god it represented.

Now that it was lost Hale understood his friend felt much as an intensely religious white man would feel if believing he was beyond the Divine compassion. Black Cloud avoided his people. Hale knew he would never return to them unless he could recover the lost symbol. This did not mean the finding of the actual article lost, but something so close to it in resemblance that the Indian mind could accept it as the original.

Or it might mean something entirely different from the lost fetish in outward appearance, but of such transcendent potency as to demand its appropriation by Black Cloud as a satisfactory badge of his guardian spirit.

Hale understood Indians better than most white men. Had he been asked to tell a tenderfoot what it all meant he would, if he told anything, simply describe it as "a frame of mind." Black Cloud lived in hell, and yet he would be lifted into the heavens the moment his mind assured him he had replaced the lost symbol

with one equally powerful. The manito the fetish had stood for was either powerless or indifferent and would aid him none. If this bothered the tenderfoot's comprehension Hale might have explained.

"Same as if you worshipped steam. Say the steam boiler in the saw-mill outside Idaho City. You let the fire go out and your steam-god won't saw out any more lumber. Build a fire and heat the water and he'll work for you. But what happens if you can't find fuel? Your god keeps on sleeping. He won't help you find wood. That's the way it is with the Indian. His god won't help him any."

When they met at the spring Hale's first words was the grave inquiry:—

"Has the lost been found, my brother?"

"It is lost. It is deep under the earth or high in the sky," was the answer.

After a suitable period of silence Hale described his difficulties and asked his friend to ride with him to the hidden gulch. Black Cloud replied:—

"I know the place. There is much gold there. It is the home of the evil spirits. Sometimes a bad spirit growls and throws down a mountain. The spirits were angry when white men began to come here. They threw down a mountain and almost closed the mouth of the little valley. The bad spirit will work evil on the first white man to enter the place."

"That man is dead, killed from behind," said Hale, thinking of Lucky Tom.

"Then my white brother can enter. It is bad to be the first white man to go there."

Hale remembered Old Idaho's assertion that he had been the first to visit the gulch, but he said nothing of it to his friend as it would puzzle the Indian to explain how the old man had escaped disaster. Because of the lateness of the hour and the further fact that the

Indian's horse was hobbled a mile away Hale reluctantly decided he must remain at the foot of the ridge and make the journey during the next night. He had no fear about Old Idaho finding the gulch. The old man knew the country well and, aided by the map, he could not overlook the hidden entrance. Doubtless he had passed by the slide many times.

Hale slept till long after sunrise. Black Cloud devoted his time to making two bows and many hunting arrows. He had gathered from Hale's talk that it would not be wise to use fire-arms in or about the gulch. The morning was spent in idling by the white man, in making arrows by the red man. After they had eaten the nidday meal Black Cloud said :—

"There was a black shadow covering the trail behind my brother's feet."

It was his way of asking if there were any news to report concerning the assassins. Early in their friendship Hale had told him of his secret fears.

"The shadow creeps very close. It has touched my heels. Some day I will turn and kick it."

The Indian nodded and moved his hand in the gesture "to kill."

They started in early evening, Black Cloud scouting ahead so as to warn his friend of any danger. When they were within a quarter of a mile of Old Idaho's cabin and about to ford the river Hale was startled to behold a light moving about the log structure. He directed his friend to take the mare and ford the stream and wait for him. Without a word the Indian rode into the water, leading Pinaquana. Retreating to the sage-brush Hale advanced rapidly to the cottonwoods.

The light was now inside the cabin and he could hear low voices. Suddenly the light vanished and a door closed. Hale dropped to the ground. He could hear

the men mounting and the horses slowly moving up the river road. One man declared :—

“ We'll git the old skunk yet. He can't hide up with that girl. He's bound to come back.”

“ He ain't hiding. He just happens to be away. Nothing's been touched in the cabin. He won't know he's had callers.”

Hale thought he recognised this speaker as Sheriff Bowen.

They rode on and Hale was about to go back to the ford when three men came up. He sank back on his heels and laid aside his rifle and drew his revolvers. Between him and the brilliant heavens the three men were silhouettes. They were travelling at a trot to overtake the main body of horsemen and as they passed close to him and gave spur to their mounts one was saying :—

“ We'll soon be leading him over the rim of the basin.”

With a snarl Hale leaped to his feet and fired three times into the darkness where he believed they had disappeared. Under cover of the hoarse shouts and general confusion he ran swiftly to the ford and crossed. The Indian was kneeling on the bank, his rifle ready. The posse was banging away in the sage. Hale had re-acted before he knew it. Had there been a second of thought he would have withheld his lead, for at the best he could only trust to luck.

To kill the three men was the great desire of his heart. Their death would remove the black shadow always at his heels and allow him to live openly and without fear among his fellows. Until they were dead he could not humanise his life. But to shoot in the darkness was a weakness. It betrayed to them that some one was trying to slay from ambush even as they had killed Lucky Tom. Had he followed them for a space he might have learned how they called each other ; then he

could have fully identified them at his convenience. He cursed the impulse that made him shoot.

Had they not spoken the few words which betrayed them to him, had they refrained from saying "over the rim of the basin" he would not have been taken off his guard.

"Do we have a fight?" eagerly asked Black Cloud as his friend mounted the bank.

"No, no!" replied Hale, hurrying from the bank and leaving the desultory firing and angry bawling behind.

"If the medicine was not lost!" muttered the Indian.

Hale knew his friend yearned to sound his cry of defiance and do battle with the posse, that the absence of his luck fetish alone, perhaps, permitted his being held in restraint.

As they moved south from the river Hale bitterly complained to himself:—

"I've missed my big chance! I've thrown it away like a fool. I could have run after them and dogged them along the Placerville road, and they never would have suspected I was at hand. I could have scouted until they came within range of a light; then I'd have learned who they are, those last three. 'Lead me over the rim of the basin' will they? Curse their black hearts! If they'll give me the tenth of a chance I'll take some of 'em with me. Give me half a second for action and they'll never send me over the rim alone as they did poor dad."

"My white brother talks to his medicine," murmured the Indian, deeply impressed. Then mournfully: "Black Cloud can watch the stars. He has no medicine to make a feast for, or to talk to."

Changing their course so as to travel parallel to the river, Hale recovered his composure and briefly explained:—

" I shot at a black shadow across the river and scared it. A dozen men are shooting at the sage-brush. I was very foolish. We must ride hard."

" When Black Cloud had his medicine bag around his neck he would not run away. He would ride into the white men and make them race their ponies to escape him. But now Black Cloud cannot think. He is like a child in his head. His legs are slow and his arms feeble like those of a root-eating man."

The shouting and firing ceased. The two friends could discover no signs of being pursued. Two hours before sunrise they halted before a hill of broken rock. They dismounted and waited patiently until the light increased and revealed the huge toys of granite, rhyolite, quartzite and limestone which the children of the old gods had fashioned and left strewn around the horizons to worry the feet of pygmies.

This halt was to spare Old Idaho and his daughter any alarm. Hale studied the slide curiously. To all appearances there was solid rock behind the mighty mass of debris. Hale feared his red friend had piloted him wrong; and yet his recollection of Lucky Tom's map demanded this ending to their journey. Black Cloud read the doubt in the frowning brows and said:—

" Over there where grape-vines seem to grow against the rock is where we enter."

He pointed to the right where Hale could discern nothing but the solid rock of a high cliff standing deep in the slide.

Hale half rose and snapped his fingers to Pinaquana and began picking his way along the edge of the talus. As he neared the cliff his scepticism increased, although he knew this was the place indicated in the miner's map. Black Cloud, mounted, passed him and, reaching the cliff, jumped down and pulled a mass of grape-vines one side.

A few feet to the left the cliff shelved in, but it was not until Hale entered that he perceived it was the entrance to a long narrow corridor between the concave base of the cliff and the broken rock of the slide.

The narrow passage was dark, but Pinaquana, sent ahead, picked her way with great confidence. Hale stumbled along, holding to her tail, for some two hundred feet, when the mare turned sharply to the right. Directly ahead was a patch of ghostly light, the light of early morning.

Emerging from the entrance Hale stared at the little gulch in amazement. It was scarcely more than a pocket, with a maximum width of not more than a quarter of a mile, and, he estimated, a length of less than half a mile. On all sides except at the entrance rose the mountain walls to a height ranging from one to three thousand feet. In the foreground and on his left was the overhanging shoulder of a cliff that seemed to be about to fall and fill the gulch. Black Cloud grunted and muttered :—

“Bad medicine in here.”

His hand went to his throat where once had hung the rawhide thong secured to the little medicine bag.

“I wouldn’t want to sleep under that cliff, old girl,” Hale told Pinaquana.

He knew this was a foolish fear for any one tarrying in the gulch ; for should the leaning cliff give way one might as well be under it as beneath the opposite wall, as the gulch measured its minimum width at this point.

As he stared, fascinated, at the sombre mass of rock a slight form emerged from the thick shadows beneath it, and the next moment the girl Harriet was gliding toward them, her Henry rifle half-raised. The Indian raised his hand above his head, palm outward. Hale softly called :—

"It's us, Miss Harry. Shoshoni Hale and his friend, Black Cloud."

"Hau!" grunted the Shoshoni.

The girl ducked her head timidly and said to Hale: "Granddaddy's asleep. He nearly killed himself yesterday. It's turned his mind, I think."

"Meaning just what, Miss Harry?" asked Hale as he slipped the saddle and bridle from the mare and turned her loose.

"Oh, the gold," she sighed. "I hate it. We should have stayed at home."

"That's blaming me. The Idaho City sheriff and his gang were at your home last night. Patterson has commenced his game even if he is in jail on a murder charge."

"But granddaddy never did any wrong," she remonstrated.

"Of course not, Miss Harry. And I ain't done anything very bad myself; yet they chase me. If I was a murderer and a thief they'd treat me fine and make me a deputy sheriff and send me out to round up honest people and charge 'em with being law-breakers. But it'll be all right pretty soon."

"I'm worrying more about granddaddy than about what that sheriff will do," she faltered. "He's coming. He's heard us."

She nervously faced the dark recess under the cliff.

"Who be you out there? Speak mighty pert or I'll fire," challenged the trembling voice of Old Idaho.

"It's me, granddaddy. And Mr. Hale and his Indian friend," cried the girl.

Muttering rapidly, Old Idaho came out from under the cliff and joined them. His frosty eyes had no welcome for the newcomers. His first words were:—

"Seems to me we're gitting kind of crowded in here. Cal'late on staying long?"

Hale smiled grimly. The girl coloured vividly and rebuked :—

“ For shame, granddaddy ! This gulch belongs to Mr. Hale. He told us how to get here. You mustn’t talk like that.”

The hands holding the long muzzle-loading rifle shook violently as the old man cried :—

“ Mustn’t, eh ? I say this is my discovery. I say this is where I chased the lost cattle in ’forty-five and picked up free gold. That feller that lived here jumped my claim. He blew in my dust. Lord only knows how much of my gold he squandered. I won’t be robbed of what’s left.”

“ No one will rob you,” soothed Hale. “ My friend, Black Cloud, has no use for gold. If there isn’t enough for you and me I’ll worry along with very little. A posse visited your cabin last night. Let’s not quarrel in here. We’re all friends.”

“ A posse come after me, eh ? ” whispered the old man, dropping the butt of his rifle on the ground and extending a trembling hand to clutch Hale’s arm. Then fiercely : “ If you know that, then they know you was there and they’ve followed you ! This place, my Lost Diggings, will be filled up with ‘em ! My girl will be a beggar ! ”

He gave way to senile emotion and his speech became inarticulate and devoid of meaning.

“ No one saw us. No one knows there is such a place as this. If we are careful and build no fire in the day-time no one will stumble upon us in here,” soothed Hale.

“ If they do they shan’t live to git outside and spread it ! ” wildly declared the old man.

With that threat he turned and walked back into the shadows beneath the cliff. Hale followed after him but was bluntly told :—

"This is my side of the gulch. You'n' your friend can find lodgings somewhere else."

"Don't be angry with him, Mr. Hale," pleaded the girl.

"I won't if you'll kindly drop the 'mister.' Either Shoshoni Hale, or just Hale."

"He's upset by finding the gold—Shoshoni Hale," the girl continued, her eyes sparkling with tears. "He worked all day taking rock in under the cliff. He seems afraid that he'll lose what he can't tote in there. There's plenty of free gold. There's a spring up the gulch, and around it you can see the gold glistening in the rock that's fallen from the wall. I'll get you something to eat. I cooked last night. You can be looking around."

Hale took this as a hint for him to keep away from the overhanging cliff for awhile. Accompanied by the Indian he explored the gulch for its full length. The upper end terminated against a wall of rock fully three thousand feet high. They found the spring and near it a spring-pole with a sledge-hammer attached. Lucky Tom had installed the crude device for pounding the quartz. A natural depression in the rock had been utilised for a mortar, as shown by the fragments of rock and specks of gold. Close by the spring was the brush shelter the miner had mentioned. It contained blankets, a water-jug and some sun-dried beef, dried beans and some bacon.

The soft voice of the girl gave the signal for them to return. They found her standing by a slab of rock on which were meat, bread and coffee, all cold. She explained :—

"To-night, when it is dark, I'll cook something hot. I've been talking to granddaddy and he's more reasonable just now. He'd rather you wouldn't go under the ledge, but we'll eat here." The increased light allowed Hale to observe the old man's retreat more minutely. Suddenly he demanded :—

"What's those three small kegs hold?"

Before the girl could answer Old Idaho appeared and suddenly answered:—

"Powder. Think it was vegetables?"

Hale frowned and commenced eating. After a few minutes he said:—

"If that powder should bust loose we'd all be buried. You keep 'em too near the fire. Sparks might blow in there. We'll have to make different arrangements. And this is no place to use powder anyway."

Old Idaho at once was suspicious and asked: "What's your game now? Struck a rich vein that you reckon to prospect with my powder? No, siere!"

"No one wants to use your powder," assured Hale. "And you're not going to use it, either. I won't stand for you burying all of us in this hole. We'll move the powder clear of the cliff."

At first Old Idaho resolutely refused to have the powder moved, but after the girl had pictured to him the fearful calamity of blowing up the cliff and filling the gulch he weakened. Danger to their lives would have made no appeal to him, but the possibility of losing the rich diggings filled him with fright. He rolled the kegs out for Hale to take away, and insisted:—

"Put 'em where they'll keep dry. The chunks of rock by the spring must have rotted loose from some mighty rich vein, for they're filled with gold. If we could drill in there and set off a blast we'd uncover an eternal fortune."

"Time enough to think of that after we've cleaned up the loose stuff on the ground," said Hale.

With the powder cached Old Idaho began his frantic task of accumulating rocks rich with gold. Hale had no desire to prospect just then and stayed near the flat rock and watched the girl gather up the tin dishes. He insisted on washing them for her in the stream that

flowed from the spring but she resolutely refused, saying it was her place to do the squaw work. With the few dishes out of the way there was nothing to do but idle away the hours. Black Cloud wandered up the gulch and Hale said his friend desired to be alone.

After a long silence and a dreamy survey of the blue sky resting on the gulch wall the girl abruptly said :—

“ I’ve heard queer stories about you, Shoshoni Hale.”

He nodded lazily and continued his play of tossing bits of quartz from hand to hand.

“ Not all of them are pleasant,” she added.

He slowly dropped the pebbles and stared at her inquiringly. Determined to force him to some expression, she said :—

“ They say you were outside the law before you came down this way.”

He resumed his pebble tossing.

“ You don’t deny it ? ” she sharply demanded.

“ Bless you, Miss Harry, I never deny anything a young woman wants to believe about me.”

“ But I don’t want to believe it.”

“ Then don’t. Who can make you ? ‘ They say,’ and ‘ I heard,’ have done more harm than the redskins ever did. Who’s to make you believe wrong of me ? ”

She coloured and puckered her brows and then returned :—

“ Well, when folks keep on saying a thing——”

“ That makes it true, of course,” he gravely completed.

“ But you do live with Indians,” she said.

“ I have lived with Indians, both Shoshoni—that’s why I’m called that—and the Nez Perces. The last were never known to make holes in their noses despite their name. They’re a brave people. Their friendship has always been offered the whites and it’s worth having. The Shoshoni are good people, too, if you use ’em

right. You'd probably think better of me if I was always killing 'em off."

"It's queer you don't seem keen to get gold," she mused.

"Ain't it?" he agreed. "And you've said the gold here had turned your grandfather's mind. I suppose you mean there's a middle trail one can take between not wanting any and wanting it all. But I do like gold and I have to have it. Just now I don't feel like panning it out. It's here; no one's going to steal this gulch. No hurry."

She had nothing more to say and after a slight pause left him and went to where her grandfather was feverishly at work. Hale did not seek her company again until late in the evening he received the call for supper. This time the food was hot. After eating he and the Indian returned to near the entrance and spread their blankets. If any one should stumble upon the hidden corridor he would arouse the two sleepers. Before they rolled in their blankets the Indian asked:—

"Why is a cloud between my friend and the boy woman?"

"There is no cloud."

"The evil spirits of this place made me think it."

"I think we'll be leaving here sometime to-morrow, Black Cloud."

"It is good," grunted the Indian.

After the morning meal Hale whistled to Pinaquana and the Indian went after his pony. The girl watched Hale throw on the saddle and then ran to him.

"You'll go out in the daytime?" she asked, her eyes round with astonishment.

"There'll be no danger to you and your grandfather. We shall be very careful," he assured.

"And you won't be back until dark?"

"Why, Miss Harry, I'm reckoning on being gone for

quite a bit. When things quiet down and I can be of any help to you two I'll come back."

She dropped cross-legged on the ground and tilting her head looked up at him speculatively. He avoided her gaze. She amazed him by saying:—

"I think it was mighty fine when you wouldn't say you was not guilty of all the fool things folks might say about you. I'm glad, Shoshoni Hale, that you wouldn't bother to talk about it. I reckon I must be very young to talk as I did. Why, if you'd taken the trouble to tell me you never done the things some loose-tongued people say you've done it would be like spending your time to find colour in a pan of salmon-berries."

Hale suspended his work and in great bewilderment stared down into her upturned face.

"I reckoned from the way you talked yesterday and the way you left me all of a sudden that you'd feel freer, as if you had more room, if Black Cloud and me hit an outside trail."

She laughed as if heartily amused.

"Did I fool you as good as that? Then I'm sorry I tried it. Take that saddle off Pinaquana. The poor thing wants to run and roll."

"I don't go to bother any one," he muttered, his hands resting on the saddle.

"And you don't go to leave me alone and afraid," she said. "Why, I couldn't bear to stay here with granddaddy and him that notional."

"If I thought I could be of any service," he said, his gray-green eyes staring up the gulch after the Indian.

"Then that's settled," she exclaimed, jumping to her feet and beginning to remove the saddle. Without a word he completed the task and sent the mare galloping up the gulch.

"Black Cloud will think I'm a fool to change my mind so easy," he mumbled.

"Tell him I asked you to stay," she urged.

"Oh, he won't speak of it. When he sees the mare he'll know I've changed my mind and he'll leave me to guess what he's thinking."

Then began what for Hale at least was an idyllic existence. While Old Idaho laboured early and late to add to his stock of gold Hale walked and talked with the girl. From viewing her as being a mischievous child he discovered her mental qualities made her his teacher in many things. His life had been direct and objective and had contained none of the softening influences which permit of fanciful speculations.

She opened his mind to a keener appreciation of the glories of nature. Her love for the morning and evening lights gave him a new viewpoint. He had always considered the purple haze as a material obstruction to the vision. Under her tutelage he learned it was a curtain between him and fairyland. The illusory world behind the veil became very real as she translated mountain peaks and ridges into giants' castles and homes of princesses.

To steal through the long corridor and from behind the grape-vines watch the appearance and vanishing of mountain top and graven slope was a rare adventure. Every day a new world was created and exposed to their gaze and then hidden away; and her soft voice artlessly giving word pictures of her impressions fed an unsuspected soul hunger in him.

So she became the teacher and he the pupil. He had said he never had been a boy; now he was very boyish, as he sprawled at full length at her feet and listened to the stories woven out of the purple and violet shades, out of the coming and going of sculptured heights. She fed the empty places of his soul which should have been satisfied when he was younger.

He translated some of her imagery to Black Cloud

who unhesitatingly accepted them as logical causations for various phenomena. The Indian took to watching the child-woman as one who is gifted with mystery-medicine.

At night, from the same hiding-place, she allowed her fancies to make free with the velvet darkness and the brilliant dome of the dust-free sky. Black Cloud said the domed firmament was made of ice and that when the serpent god scraped his rough back against it the earth had rain or snow, and that the rainbow was the colours of the god. She readily accepted this explanation and proceeded to embroider it with her own quaint notions and won the Indian to several colourful amendments, until it was doubtful whether he remained orthodox.

"She is very big medicine woman," he gutturally informed Hale one night. "She sees the teepees of my people, who lived many winters ago. She is The-woman-who-can-look-backward into the past. She says the early light lets us look into the spirit land. Last night she called me to see the snake god run along the top of the mountains. Never before has he left the sky."

He referred to the twilight period when the shadows filled the plains and crept up the distant heights and engulfed all in darkness except the serrate crest, which, still glorified by the sun, became an undulating line of fire.

"I'll follow her game and play it with a copper," declared Hale in English, addressing himself rather than the Indian. "She has everything beat I ever heard tell of. She give me the shivers when she said there were things very strange and pretty close by us all the time if we had eyes sharp enough to see 'em. And then her reckoning Pinaquana could see things I never saw; that dogs could do the same. Course it's her

play, but how's one to tell when she's making up things and when she's in earnest?"

As one result of the girl's fanciful flights Black Cloud to a certain degree forgot his dislike of the gulch. Possibly he reasoned that the girl's medicine offset the baneful influence of the local spirits.

Old Idaho continued to pick up the rich rock, or wash out from thirty to sixty dollars' worth of gold from each pan of gravel. Now and then Hale would be very busy searching for small nuggets, but so sure as the girl went a-wandering he dropped prospecting to join her. And when she walked away from the overhanging cliff Black Cloud followed. Unless she called him to her he kept back a score of yards. And always his bearing was that of a man overawed. One day he told Hale :—

"She has been touched by the biggest medicine. Her eyes see beyond the snake god in the sky. She can look down into the earth very deep. She tells Black Cloud that the Big Mystery is trying to tell his white and red children what everything means, and is using for his sign-language the going-to-sleep and the waking-up of the sun. Many times, my white brother, we have watched the sun crawl out on top of the Bitter Root range, but never twice did we see the sky look just the same. So now I know why the Big Mystery uses so many paints when the sun goes to sleep or throws aside his cloud blankets in the morning. When we know why he uses the different paints we can read his signs; then we will know everything—and I will find my medicine."

At the first opportunity Hale cautioned the girl :—

"Better be a bit careful, Miss Harry, how you fill the Indian up with fairy stories. He now reckons you have a big sun medicine and can help him find his lost medicine."

"His medicine is what he thinks it is, Shoshoni," she calmly replied. "He could never lose it if he believed he had not lost it."

Hail mulled this over and with a shake of his head said :—

"I just can't make sense out of that, Miss Harry. He either lost it, or he didn't lose it. And I'll swear no medicine-bag has hung around his neck since he came west of the Rockies."

"Another bag would hold his medicine just as much as the lost bag did if he only thought so," she serenely replied. "I think I'll make him up one and say it's filled with star dust."

"He'd open it. You can't fool him," Hale warned.

"I don't want to fool him. I want to help him. I'm sorry for him. He'll not be happy till he believes he has his medicine back. His lost medicine had something to do with the stars, I know. He's always watching them at night."

"You can't fool that Indian, Miss Harry. You'd best keep clear of any plan to give him a medicine. It's mighty serious business to him."

"Of course it is. It's serious to us when we reckon things are going wrong and we haven't any luck. I'll tell him the last sunset told me that the star dust will melt and become nothing if he ever opens the bag."

Hale whistled softly and stared at her with unbounded admiration. Then he sternly said :—

"It won't do. You mustn't try it. It would be most dangerous, let alone cheating."

The last reflected a slight leaning toward a belief in the supernatural induced by his lonely life in the mountains and his long acquaintance with the red men.

"How cheating?" she sharply demanded ; and he knew she was displeased. "A warrior is sick, and a

grass-root medicine man offers to cure him for a copper kettle. He pretends to take pieces of iron and some pebbles from the sick man and then tells him he's all well. Many times the warrior gets up and reckons he is well. Who worked the cure? The grass-root man, or the sick man himself? His medicine is what he believes.

" You and I know, Shoshoni, that the bag he wore around his neck could never help him when he was sick or help him in war. It was probably filled with bits of coloured glass and a coloured feather. But the things the trash stood for—the rainbow, the stars, or whatever it was—and his belief in those things made him very brave and, of course, respected. You meet Patterson. You believe your guns are loaded. You're not afraid of him. But if you believed they were not loaded you'd feel different."

" Rake in the pot. You win. But no experiments with his medicine."

" It's just like your notion that some one is going to shoot you from the dark, or strike you down from behind," she ran on, inspired to be bold because of his obvious homage. " You've run from the fear ever since you was a boy, so you say. But you never got away from it. Black Cloud says it's a black shadow, always right at your heels."

" There's no mistake about what's after me," was the grim reply. " I had a sample of how real it is when Lucky Tom was killed. His murderers were at your cabin and I heard their threats and was fool enough to show my hand by banging away at them in the dark."

" Oh, I suppose something or other is after us all the time," she sighed. " If it is, it is; and it can't be helped. But if we turn and face it, it sometimes kicks up its heels and runs away."

" But what if you can never see it when you turn around?" he asked, his voice edged with exasperation.

"Then the chances are it isn't there. Only shadows. It was there when it killed poor Lucky Tom? Yes. But all these years you've been hiding up in the mountains it wasn't there. Yet never a day but what you felt it at your shoulder. Shadows! I reckon, Shoshoni, you've done most of your running from something that was on your mind, not on your trail."

"All right," he glumly said. "Nothing will satisfy you that I ain't a coward till I go back to town and git shot up when I ain't looking in the right direction."

"Shoshoni Hale, you're trying to make me feel bad. And you're coming too mighty close to it for you to say much more."

"Miss Harry, I feel that way toward you that I'd rather be dead with a Danite knife through my throat than to have you reckon I'm scared of my shadow."

"Danites!" she whispered, her hand on his wrist, her eyes wild with fright.

"They killed my father," he explained. "I was sixteen at the time. My father joined them. In 'fifty-nine he tried to escape to the Upper Country, as they then called Idaho. We two started north. We almost made the Snake River when they jumped our camp one night. Came in out of the darkness. I was after a stray horse in the bush. I heard the shots. I yelled for two reasons; I was scared, and I had a notion that if they heard me they'd run after me and leave my father alone. They did run to find me and I circled back and saw my father for a minute before he died. He told me to change my name and to keep away from them, that they would hunt for me wherever I was, for his fault was such as to call for the killing of his people, root and branch. I was the only one left for them to kill. But as you say, it's high time I quit running from shadows."

"Promise me you won't let my silly talk make you

act reckless," she begged of him, her face frightened. " You mustn't leave here. Who would I talk to? Granddaddy would drive me crazy with his queer actions. Aren't you happy here?"

" Very happy, Miss Harry. But a man must work. We can't always stay here, it's too pleasant. Queer that one usually has to quit doing the thing he likes to do."

" Promise me, Shoshoni, you won't be rash and run into danger," she pleaded. " A girl's foolish talk wouldn't make you do that, would it?"

" You ain't talked any foolishness that I've heard. But as to danger I don't reckon to do anything that'll send me over the rim of the basin. So don't you fret."

The subject was dropped and their companionship continued on the old impersonal plane of fairy stories, quaint speculations, with the girl equalling any red man in supplying a cause for any unusual effect. Her whimsicalities were accepted by Black Cloud as being the gospel of nature. But now that the Indian undertook to supply game Hale and the girl were more alone.

With his bow and arrows Black Cloud stole from the gulch and brought in rabbits. Once he ventured north to the river and secured wild ducks, making the return at night. Once he killed a deer. He also secured a generous supply of camas roots, the Indian's bread and potato.

For his personal enjoyment he often ate the quallah root, of disagreeable flavour and tasting like tobacco and supposed to be poisonous when eaten raw. Blackberries and grapes were abundant, the latter to be had at the mouth of the gulch. He also filled bark dishes with gooseberries.

Hale had been superlatively happy up to the time he and the girl talked about the Indian's lost medicine

and she, with the bluntness of the inexperienced but precocious, had assumed to correct his line of thought. With black care no longer dogging him, with the company of a glorious girl to bless him, he asked nothing more of heaven and earth. After her immature wisdom impelled her to advise him in what he had supposed to be purely a man's game, his happiness became streaked with misery and shame.

When alone he would proceed to the extremity of declaring himself to be a coward. She had as good as said that he was running away from a shadow; undoubtedly she believed he was afraid to play a game where he must die if he lost. Then she would come running to join him, and while he could lounge at her side he would forget his trouble. The fact that she avoided further reference to his enemies induced him to spells of brooding. He was careful to conceal his melancholy from her, for he disliked scenes. Several nights after their talk he spoke to her grandfather at some length.

On returning to the fire-hole, where glowed a bed of coals, he announced :—

"I must go outside to-night, Miss Harry. Black Cloud will stay here with you."

"Go outside, Shoshoni?" she repeated. "I don't understand."

"It's on your granddaddy's business. It's very simple and yet very important," he lightly explained.

"But how can that be?" she suspiciously demanded. "We left everything when we came here. Either the cabin stands, or has been burned. What business have you to go out to-night—and you a hunted man?"

"He has some specimens stacked up in the hills a few miles from the house. If they're found by that Idaho City gang they'd pretend he was grinding the specimens into bogus gold dust. Every man takes

samples of ore and pounds 'em up so's to find out what he has. That's the miner's daily life. But Patterson and his gang would pounce upon your granddaddy's specimens to prove he's a counterfeiter."

"There isn't one chance in a million of those men finding his samples. He didn't bring any to the cabin."

"We don't want to take even the shadow of a chance. There's no danger in it for me. It's night. I have the valley all to myself. By this time my enemies think I'm up in the Kootenai country. Just keep the Cloud interested with your fairy stories and I'll be back before you know it."

"But why not send the Indian, or at least take him with you?" she protested, instinct warning her something was brewing that she never would approve of.

"Pinaquana doesn't seem quite herself and I'm taking up Cloud's pony. It's a one-man job. Don't worry your pretty head."

"What!" she gasped, and the glow from the coals seemed to transfigure her face.

It needed no firelight to redden his face. It was the first hint at a compliment. He faltered:—

"Just a way of talking, Miss Harry. No harm meant."

"Say it again," she commanded.

"I asked you not to worry your pretty head."

"Do you think it's pretty?" she eagerly cried.

"Of course. All young women are pretty," he awkwardly answered.

"Oh!"

She walked toward the recess where her grandfather was resting on his blankets and Hale took advantage of her absence to hurry through the corridor and through the grape-vine curtain where Black Cloud stood waiting beside the pony. Hale was hurt that she should so

suddenly lose interest in his going. She had not even bid him good-bye, or wished him luck.

What he did not know was that the slim figure passed through the grape-vines and was following him on foot until the Indian overtook her in the darkness and compelled her to return to the gulch. Thus trifles had worked on Hale's mind until he was wallowing in misery.

He knew only one cure for it, and he looked hungrily ahead to his true errand outside the gulch. Four miles from the river he entered between two low hills and led his horse up the bed of a little creek. There was enough water in pools to wet his moccasins and thereby guide his feet. At last his feet encountered a mound of dirt, and he hobbled the pony and gathered dry twigs and lighted a fire.

As fuel was added, the flames lighted the small hollow and revealed a crude mill, worked by horse-power. Beside the mill were several crucibles. The crucibles he smashed and threw on the roaring fire. The mill was next assailed and dismantled bit by bit and added to the flames. Hale displayed no desire for secrecy. His mood welcomed an intrusion ; but as he laboured he did not neglect to listen occasionally. He was not disturbed, however. To further conceal the site of the mill he piled fuel on it and started a second fire. Satisfied that this evidence would never be counted against the old man he led the pony down the creek bed.

The night was yet early and his work, so far as it concerned Old Idaho, was finished. His major errand, the one he had kept concealed from the girl, remained. He impatiently made for the river road, and on reaching it rode north-east at top speed. Early morning found him hidden outside of Placerville and soundly asleep.

CHAPTER VII

HUNTING THE SHADOWS

LATE in the afternoon Hale hobbled the pony in a thicket and hid his belt and one revolver along with his rifle. With one gun concealed inside his shirt he walked to the town and entered the first store. The miners had not yet returned from their work and the store had but one customer. Making his way to the back of the store, Hale watched the proprietor and the customer and decided that neither of the men suspected his identity. He had not believed there was much chance of being recognised either in Placerville or Centerville unless it be by some citizen from Idaho City.

The storekeeper came to wait on him, and it required but a few minutes to select a pair of trousers, a pair of boots, a hickory shirt and a hat. He asked a few questions about the Owyhee country and imparted the information he had just arrived from over the mountains. Returning to the pony he shifted into his new clothes and wrapped his mountain dress about his rifle and left the bundle where he could quickly recover it. Then, belting on one gun and thrusting the other into his boot he rode back into Placerville.

The town claimed a population of six thousand people and was distinct from other towns in the Boise basin in that it resembled a Spanish settlement in the arrangement of its business section. The stores and saloons

faced upon a plaza. It was the beginning of twilight when Hale returned to the square. The worrying west winds no longer sent spirals of dust a thousand feet into the air, and the heat of the day already was being sucked up into the cloudless spaces.

Hale selected an eating-house where business was dull and seated himself at a corner table and ordered elk steak, bread and coffee. The Mexican who waited on him accepted him as a miner and in broken English asked the usual questions. For the benefit of the bartender across the room, Hale gruffly announced he was from the Hell Gate diggings and had crossed the mountains by the Lolo trail, and had tried the Lolo and Oro Fino Rivers, only to find all the promising benches were taken up. Now he was working south to the Owyhee district and was anxious to learn the stage tariff to Ruby City as he had been compelled to buy a new outfit and was short of money. The bartender lazily aroused himself and volunteered the desired information. It was too early for the evening rush and there were only four other customers in the place, three at a table and one at the bar.

Hale shifted his remarks from the waiter to the bartender and explained :—

“ I’d like to git down to the Uintah Mountains after I look over the Owyhee country, but I reckon the Mormons have that place pretty well settled ? ”

“ Nothing worth while has been struck in the Uintah range this season,” oracularly informed the bartender. “ But if a man does find something good down there his best game is to hitch up with some Mormon, one that stands high in the church, as a partner. Some one like Mushet or Burnham.”

Hale drank his coffee and remarked :—

“ When I say the Uintahs it don’t mean I’d meander round wholesale over the whole range. Feller up on

the Lolo River showed me some specimens. Told me just where he got 'em. They looked mighty good. If he didn't lie about 'em, and I could work the diggings without being bothered by the church I'd try it. He wanted me to go down there with him, but he got into a fight and was plugged."

"Tod Mushet's close to Brigham Young. So's his partner, West Burnham. If you have anything worth drawing to they might take you in. Reckon the man with the specimens didn't stick to work the diggin's along of not taking in the right kind of partner. Of course they run him out," said the bartender between yawns.

"Reckon it'll be more of a case of me taking 'em in," grumbled Hale.

"Play your hand," mumbled the bartender wearily.

"I'll try it alone afore I'll go to Salt Lake. I wouldn't go down there again even to git Brigham himself as a partner," declared Hale.

"You don't have to go there to see Mushet and Burnham. They're over to Idaho City if they ain't dug out within a day or so."

"Mebbe they wouldn't want to quit their business up here to go with me," suggested Hale.

This amused the bartender hugely.

"Go with you? 'Spose they'd go tramping over the Uintahs to see if you really had something? They'd give you a line in writing, saying they was equal partners with you. Then they'd send some one along to keep tabs on you. If you struck something you'd do all the work and they'd claim their share. And take it too. Mushet and Burnham don't swing a pick no more."

"At Idaho City, eh?" mused Hale.

"Oh, I ain't no newspaper. I only know they was there, and that they come through with the sheriff 'bout two weeks ago."

"I don't know as they be much good as partners, if they're already in trouble with your sheriff."

"They ain't had no trouble with the sheriff," growled the bartender. "Didn't you fall and hurt your head when a child? How in hell could they have any say as to who can prospect in the Uintahs if they was in trouble up here? The di'mon' talk has been holding 'em up this way."

The man at the bar nodded his approval of this caustic speech and decided the man from the Hell Gate diggings was thick-headed. The bartender believed himself to be in excellent form and lowered contemptuously at Hale.

Hale meekly reminded:—

"It was all along of your saying they was with the sheriff."

"Well, I'll be damned! Can't you *sabe* they was with him because they know him? They're friends of his. Don't you know a sheriff can have a few friends and go riding with 'em? The sheriff was after a old gray rat who's been making gold dust faster'n the Esmeralda can produce it. Sheriff rode out to bag him. Mushet and Burnham went along to see the fun."

"That di'mon' talk made by Lyon has fetched lots of Boise City men up here," spoke up the man at the bar.

"Don't I know that?" querulously retorted the bartender. "Tell us something new. Friend of Mushet's is along with him. Don't know his name. Reckon he ain't any great shucks apart from 'em. Just a hired man. But Mushet and Burnham are two high-steppers in the church. Hate to get 'em on my track when they was mad."

"Bet I've seen Mushet!" cried Hale, slapping a hand on the table. "Tod Mushet. Sure I've seen him. Seen him year ago last spring near Salt Lake. Big

broad-shouldered cuss with black whiskers that he always wears cut straight across like a spade and——”

“ Like hell you’ve seen him ! ” jeered the bartender. “ He’s got long thin whiskers, like a goat. Colour of ruby silver. Some of the boys call him the ‘ Goat ’ —behind his back. When he first struck Idaho City some two weeks ago a feller went up to him and yanked the end of his whiskers and said, ‘ Ba-a-a.’ He come within a hair of having his throat cut. If Burnham hadn’t grabbed Mushet and yanked him back and softened him down by saying the poor fool was drunk, he’d ‘a’ had that feller’s blood. The way he pulled that bowie-knife from his boot was a caution—so every one said who seen him do it.” And for a moment the speaker’s dull eyes glowed with a bit of life.

“ Mebbe it was Burnham I was thinking of,” mused Hale apologetically. “ Both names remind me strong of Salt Lake and the hot springs outside. I dunno ; mebbe it was Burnham after all.”

“ Burnham ain’t got no black whiskers. Might ‘a’ had some once. Now it’s only a little fringe of gray under his chin. His long moustache’s the same colour. He’s a funny looking galoot, but don’t never go out of your way to tell him so.”

“ I’m a prospector. I ain’t no trouble-hunter.”

“ You pack a likely looking gun,” remarked the bartender.

“ Bought it before quitting the Hell Gate country. There’s a heap of talk about Injuns on t’other side of the Bitter Root range. Blackfeet swear they’ll kill all white men. When it comes to a fight, if the other feller’ll fight fair, I’d rather have a pickaxe. There’s a weapon that hurts with both ends, and never misses fire, and is always loaded.”

Other customers now straggled in and engaged the

bartender's attention. Hale paid his score and lounged out to the plaza and mounted.

A smashing ten-mile ride and he was drawing rein in Centerville, known as the "prettiest" town in the basin. But night now concealed its charms and Hale saw only the lighted windows. He knew there was scarcely any chance of either Mushet or Burnham being in Centerville, but he wished to be thorough in his search and make sure they were ahead and never behind him. So he walked his pony to a gaming hall and dismounted and surveyed the gathering through a window. Men with beards of all colours and patterns were grouped about the tables or ranged along the bar.

The mental pictures he had drawn of Mushet and Burnham grew confused. He began to doubt his ability to identify absolutely the two Mormons from the bartender's description. He did know that the bearded face he had glimpsed in the Boise City court-room did not agree with either description. By observing the clothing and dishevelled condition of the men in the hall he was positive all were hard-working miners and gamblers. There was no mistaking the two classes.

His quarry would not be toil-stained nor dressed like sharpers. He also knew he would be aided in his task in Idaho City by watching Sheriff Bowen and his friends. In the familiar circle he was sure to find his suspects. Through the sheriff and Patterson he would locate Mushet and Burnham. Through watching the two Mormons he would soon learn the identity of the third man. Yet he visited other drinking and gaming places so as to remove all doubt.

Swinging into the saddle, he took the road to Idaho City, still filled with an indomitable purpose. He had faced about to grapple with the shadows, impelled by

the careless words of Harry Idaho. Already he fancied he felt the shackles slipping from his soul.

About a mile from town he hobbled the pony in a small gulch back from the road and covered the remaining distance on foot. The night life of the town was at full blast. From gaming halls and saloons came the sound of furious merriment, emphasised by the shrill, mechanical laughter of women. Groups of late arrivals from outlying placers were jostling along to their favourite haunts ; and there were counter-currents of those ready to turn in for a few hours' sleep before the morning fires were re-kindled beyond the Bitter Root range.

Men streamed by him with eager stride, or with unsteady steps, and every bearded face might be the one he saw in the court-room. He began to fear it would be impossible to find his quarry in the short time afforded before the coming of the sun. To eliminate one man but leave two unknown to track and slay from behind was not his plan.

They had ruthlessly slain his father and made his boyhood a period of hiding, and with scant ruth would he strike back. But he was discovering that what had seemed simple of execution back in the gulch was in reality most difficult. Were he free to enter the different places of amusement, subject only to the chance of assassination, his purpose would have continued inexorable.

But this lurking along the streets and hoping to make positive identification by glances snatched at a procession of faces which looked all alike was most futile. This method of attack, he began to concede, placed the odds against him. Despite his miner's garb he might be recognised at any moment ; the man now brushing against him might have a knife for him.

Miss Harry had as much as said that his readiness

to flee was only a frame of mind and not a necessity. Now the old shrinking back from the unknown was upon him again. Could he stalk them in the hill country and play a grim game of hide and seek until the score was complete he would not fear the issue, though it be death for him.

But the town and its shifting groups of bearded men bewildered him. He was little used to towns and did not like them because he never had trusted them. He felt out of place. So far as being on his guard was concerned he could not feel more helpless if blindfolded. Any one of the passing roisterers might be an enemy and could as easily strike him dead as if he were a sheep. As his nerves responded to his misgivings he took the inside of the walk and at last halted with his back to the wall.

To locate Mushet and Burnham definitely was simple enough were he free to make inquiry at the different saloons. But to show himself too boldly meant arrest on the charge of murder. And granted he could, by a stroke of luck, achieve the double discovery without being recognised, there would still be left the third man. As he slouched against the wall with hat brim pulled well forward he began to realise how necessary it was for him to have help. What he should have planned as the first step was the getting in touch with Jack Gorman and leaving it for him to locate the game. His own entrance on the scene should be most abrupt, and his rôle should consist purely of the avenger.

"Howdy, old pard," cried a thick voice, and he was startled to find a man standing unsteadily before him and extending the hand of fellowship.

"You're mistaken," growled Hale. "I don't know you."

"Course you don't know me," was the amiable

response. "But I know Jack Gorman and 'mire him 'mazingly. Jack's all right. Any friend of his is a friend of mine, from boots to hat brim."

"You're mistaken. I don't know your friend," said Hale, quick to note how a passer-by twisted his head about on hearing Gorman's name spoken.

"Ain't that the limit! 'Scuse me, pard. Must be drunker'n a b'iled owl. But when I caught the light shining across the side of your face I'd swear I'd seen you running round with old Jack. No hard feelings?"

"No, no," hurriedly assured Hale, anxious for the fellow to leave him.

But the man was loath to leave. He hooked his thumbs in the waistband of his trousers and rocked back on his heels and gravely attempted to see under Hale's hat brim; and all the time some half-buried conviction was striving to work its way to the front of his befuddled mind. Suddenly he cried out:

"I'm drunk, all right, but, by gawdfry, I ain't no fool. No, sir! Drunk; git over it to-morrer. Fool; never git over it. I ain't no fool."

"You're a man of much sense," soothed Hale, fearing the fellow's eccentric humours would embroil him.

"Truer word was never spoke," slowly declared the man. "And now I've got the hang of it. Knew I couldn't be mistook. You was with Gorman and Sumner Pinkham when I saw you. Why, damn it all! You're Shoshoni Hale!"

Like the bang of a buffalo gun came the name, and its utterance in Hale's ears seemed to fill the whole town. With a sweep of his right foot he mowed the man's legs from under him and brought him crashing to the ground. As he turned into a cross-street and darted away into the darkness he heard his name, coupled with strong oaths, shouted repeatedly in a hysteria of drunken rage. There was no doubting the publicity his stealthy

visit was exciting. And no man could proclaim the name of Shoshoni Hale on the streets of Idaho City without becoming the centre of a curious mob.

Cursing the chance that had permitted a drunkard to penetrate his disguise so easily, Hale left the cross-street and turned down Wall and doubled back on this until a few buildings below the point where he had tripped up the inquisitive stranger. Entering a narrow alleyway between Vantine's and another store, he stole close to the danger zone on Main Street.

He thrust out his head and glanced up the street. Two score or more of men were gathered about the drunken man. Voices were being raised and the babel threatened to become general if some one had not called for silence. Then Hale heard the man he had tripped passionately declare :—

“ I'll git even with him ! Shoshoni Hale ? Thinks I don't know him because he's quit his buckskins. I tell you I seen him the day he was rambling round with Gorman and Pinkham. I was feeling good natur'd and kind. I stopped to say ' howdy ' to the cuss, and first thing I knew my heels was higher'n my head. But I'll find him and make him chaw dirt.”

“ Dressed like what ? ” demanded a peremptory voice.

“ Like any miner, damn him. I'll——”

“ You'll go home, ‘ Muggsy,’ or I'll lock you up for two months with nary a drink,” the strident voice warned. “ You boys scatter and look about. Muggsy's drunk but he's still got his eyesight left. There's a thousand dollars for Hale. Remember that. Dave, you hustle to the Gold Dust and pass the word in the back room. Who's seen Gorman within an hour ? ”

“ He's in Kinney's place, playing dominoes. He's been there for four hours. I just come from there,” some one replied.

"He isn't in it, then. Rest of you peddle the word Hale's in town. He's bad. Shoot on sight."

Hale edged back as a group of men came toward him.

In the passageway were several barrels and Hale dropped behind these and drew his guns. As the men passed the opening the store lights fell on the face of Sheriff Bowen.

Hale ran back to Wall Street and lamented his ill-luck. Then he tried to be philosophical, and told himself the chance encounter might have been the means of saving his life. For if the tipsy miner could so easily recognise him how much more quickly would Bowen and his tools detect him. He had started toward the Centerville Road, thinking to mount his pony and ride into the hills, when two words popped into his mind and brought him to a halt. Kinney's place. Jack Gorman was there. Kinney's place was on the same side of the street as Vantine's store.

He turned about and hastened down the street until in the rear of the low structure. Entering between two small stores, he came out at the back of the resort and stole forward to a window and peered in. Gorman was seated at a corner table. He had just finished his last game, for his opponent was leaving.

As Gorman stayed to pack the dominoes in a box Sheriff Bowen turned from the bar and accosted him. The two men talked animatedly and both appeared to be angry. Bowen turned back to the bar and ordered a drink. Gorman rose and went out. Hale stepped to the corner of the building and glimpsed his friend making up the street, presumably for his room.

Realising his night's risk had been for nothing unless he could reach his friend, Hale returned to Wall and ran swiftly.

He planned to intercept his friend at the Forrest

Theatre, where the shadows would lie thickly about the darkened building and where a cross-street afforded a line of retreat. He turned from Wall into the short cross-street and gained the theatre and crouched low near the entrance. Once before from the same position he had looked down the street and had seen his friend pass through the light shining from Vantine's store. That was when Gorman had learned from Riply that Lucky Tom's body had been found and that Shoshoni Hale was being openly accused of murder.

The scene now repeated itself in part, only this time no Riply was present. But there was Gorman, swinging along the edge of the walk to escape collision with the boisterous. As he neared Hale's hiding-place he entered a zone of shadows and became a blur of a figure. But there was none else approaching the theatre, and Hale softly called :—

“ Jack ! ”

Without a word Gorman came to a halt and waited.

“ Jack ! ” repeated Hale.

“ All right, Shoshoni. I'm on. Keep low, wherever you are. They're trying to trail you. Bowen was just asking me about you.”

“ I'm here by the door. I must talk with you.”

Gorman hesitated for a moment, then directed :—

“ Go to my room ahead of me. It's unlocked. Don't show a light. I think Bowen is satisfied I knew nothing about your being in town, but I may be followed. If I am I won't go in. You take Wall and I'll go straight. I'll give you time to make it ahead of me. The side window is open if you want to duck out in a hurry.”

Hale slipped from the doorway and made off. As he left the business section of the town behind him the obscurity of the night increased as very few lights were showing. He heard the rapid clatter of hoofs as some horsemen rode toward the jail, but without hindrance

he reached the house where Gorman had the front room on the ground floor.

With all the cunning he had learned from the Indians he reconnoitred the building before venturing to cross the street. His ear against the ground failed to detect any footfalls, but he did catch a faint *thud-thud—thud-thud* of a galloping horse far off in the darkness. He waited until this ominous sound died out in the distance and then removed his boots. Doubling over, he scurried across the road and passed to the side of the house.

He crouched by the open window with drawn gun and listened until satisfied none of his enemies had suspected he might come there and were waiting in ambush. Softly reaching his boots through the window, he slipped in over the sill. He had barely stretched himself out on the floor to await Gorman's coming before he heard men approaching. There were two of them and their voices were loud and angry.

"We'll git him if he's in town. If we'd found him with you we'd 'a' got you."

"Like hell you'd git me, or Shoshoni Hale either!" scornfully retorted Gorman. "I can see you hunting for some of his gun play. If you want any of mine just step out into the middle of the street with me."

"Time enough for that, Gorman, when I git after you. I'm an officer of the law and I ain't free to take on street fighting outside my line of duty."

"Officer of the law?" jeered Gorman, halting before his door. "I'll bet you lost no time in hustling Ferd Patterson back to jail when you heard Hale was in town. Any time you feel free to take on some street fighting just come a-shooting."

Gorman slammed the outside door, hesitated a moment in the little hall, and then noisily entered his room.

"You here?" he whispered.

"By the side window."

" Git under the front window and lie flat. I'm lighting up." Hale crawled across the floor and took his position beneath the front window. Gorman lighted a lamp and threw himself into a chair, his back to the window, and put his feet on the table and lighted a pipe. There was no curtain to prevent any one from the street obtaining a view of the room.

" What's your game, Shoshoni ? "

" I came to find three Mormons. Mushet and Burnham, and one I don't know by name or sight," whispered Hale.

" I can't crowd into your game, but when you feel like trusting me I'm all ears to take in your talk. I'm playing it blind now. You're after three Mormons, one of 'em unknown. All right. I'm taking cards."

Hale hesitated, fighting down his old instinct to keep his troubles to himself ; the impress the hills had left on a boy's plastic mind. Then he said :—

" I've told the girl. No reason why I shouldn't tell you except it may draw you into a pack of trouble."

" Cut the cards. I'll be street fighting with you next. A pack of trouble ! Meaning I'm gun-shy ? " hissed Gorman, without removing his pipe.

Hale told him about his father's death and his own early troubles.

" Ever since that night when I crept away to hide myself it's been at my back, the threat of attack from cover. It's kept me from meeting folks. It's held me to the mountains. The Indians were the only strangers I could trust. Then that sign, the hand against the face in the court-room, told me they'd once more picked up the trail. Riply thought I was afraid ; I was, but not of what he had in mind. Pinkham didn't understand some things I said. Poor Pinkham ! I planned to tell him everything, same's I have told you to-night. I'm sure Burnham and Mushet are two of 'em. They

have a third man with 'em, who's most likely in on it. And I'll never quit jumping at my shadow until I know they're off my trail for good. Hell, man ! I've slunk behind a scrub pine up in the hills, a hundred miles from nowhere, and watched a prospector limp toward my fire, always thinking it might be one of the killers."

" Damn 'em ! I'll back your game. Now it begins to make sense. You had me plumb puzzled. Git 'em ? Of course you must. But there's one hole in your scheme. Lucky Tom."

Hale grunted a query, and Gorman explained :—

" They're laying Tom's death on to you. According to your tell he was mistook for you by Mushet's crowd. Then they killed him. One of those cusses ought to be saved out and made to tell the truth so's to clear you."

Hale pondered over this point thoughtfully ; then agreed.

" It sounds good. Yes, I must save one of 'em. Still Curks must know the truth, too."

" He'll be harder to get at, but we'll nail one of 'em and make him tell," encouraged Gorman. " You've stirred up the devil's own mess here to-night. Bowen now believes that drunk had the right of it, and he's picketing the town with some of his gang to stop a fellow of your build and dressed in store clothes. You must clear out at once. If they make a search and you stick here you're sure to be found."

" I can't dig out before finding my three men," protested Hale.

" Know how you feel. You're tuned up to it now and want action. But Mushet and Burnham went to Boise City yesterday to see Curks. From what I hear they're as crazy as the rest of us over Lyon's diamond talk. Curks will come back with them. I don't know

who the third man is. There's several Mormons trailing 'round with 'em at times. Since Pinkham was killed I've kept away from the Gold Dust. Patterson is there almost every night—under guard. He and Bowen and Mushet and Burnham run together a lot. He entertains at the jail, too. Your third galoot probably meets with 'em. But I'll git busy and ask some questions. Where can I git word to you?"

This was something of a problem, but Hale finally solved it by suggesting:—

"It's quite a ride, but the best place will be Old Idaho's cabin. Under the door-step. If I can't go I can send Black Cloud. But it's a long ride to take."

"No ride's too long to serve a friend. If I can't get away myself I have friends who we can trust to the limit. Now you skip out and I'll send word to the cabin when Burnham and his pard come back. Meantime I'll cast about for the third critter."

"Step into the hall and leave the door open when you come back, and I'll crawl out."

"You make me almost as mad as that fool deputy did," growled Gorman. "That new outfit of yours will give you away. I reckon I had it pretty nigh thought out while coming home."

"My buckskins would 'a' given me away, too."

"You ought to painted up and come as a Injun begging for drinks. There'd been sense in that, and you know how to play the game."

"Couldn't I stay right here, laying low to-morrow while you scout and see if those men come back, then in the evening git into action and have it over with?" anxiously said Hale.

"No. Too risky. You've got a bad name among some of the fools who believe what Bowen tells 'em. If you have to shoot any one in gitting away the whole

county would be after you. Lie still! Some one is coming."

Several men were approaching the house. Hale pressed hard against the wall and drew his guns. Gorman rested his head on the back of his chair and laid his revolver across his lap. The steps ceased opposite the window and Sheriff Bowen called out:—

"We're going to get your friend before sunrise, Gorman."

Removing his pipe and slightly turning his head, Gorman called back:—

"Bet you two hundred to fifty that you don't. Bet you two hundred to a hundred that if you meet up with him he gits you."

"Don't be too brash with your bets," snarled Bowen. "You may have some tall explaining to do after we've bagged him."

Gorman's heels came to the floor and he leaned out the window and softly demanded:—

"Just what do you mean by that, Bowen?"

Bowen saw the gun and did not relish it.

"I mean that if you've had any hand in hiding a man wanted by the law you'll answer for it."

"You're crazy," sneered Gorman. "Shoshoni Hale hasn't been within a hundred miles of Idaho City since the day your partner and bosom friend murdered Sumner Pinkham."

"By God! You talk mighty soft when you talk that stuff, Jack Gorman. You talk it so soft that nobody ever hears it," furiously warned the sheriff.

Gorman laughed.

"Uhuh? Itching to pot me, eh? Got your gun half-drawn and trying to get up nerve to risk beating me in pulling triggers. You oughter brought Patterson along. Now I'm going to give you a good chance. Only, be sure and git me first crack."

With that he returned to his chair and seated himself with his back to the window.

One of the sheriff's companions took him by the arm and whispered :—

" He'd like to keep you talking here till daylight."

This afforded Bowen a graceful escape from a very trying situation. Muttering threats, he passed on with his companions.

Gorman slowly blew some smoke rings and murmured :

" I've thought it all out now. When I was a deputy last winter we had to shoot a few Mexicans. Then we found that the leader had a serape and sombrero that Pink and I both took a notion to. I cut the deck for 'em and won. They're behind the calico curtain in the corner. I'll get them into the hall. I'll get some soot from the stove and some oil so you can darken your face and hands. Rub some dirt over your feet and be very drunk. There's a lot of Mexicans in town. I'll sneak down and get my horse——"

" I have a pony a mile out on the Centerville road. Get the stuff into the hall."

Gorman rose and yawned and stretched his arms and then walked to the curtained corner and drew back the strip of calico and knocked the cloak and peaked hat to the floor in so doing. From a hook he took a woollen sock, such as was commonly used for cleaning fire-arms, and from a shelf produced a bottle of oil. In returning to the table he kicked the hat and cloak before him. He stood facing the window, oiling and cleaning his gun and then opened the stove door.

If any one had been spying on the room from the street it would have looked as if he deposited the oily sock in the stove. In fact he rapidly besmeared it with soot and rolled it up in his hand. His next move was to the hall door, and his feet kept the cloak and hat before him. Pushing the disguise over the threshold

he dropped the sock and turned back to the window and stood for a few moments, staring up at the blazing stars.

Hale wriggled into the hall and besmeared his face until he was as dark as any Mexican. Gorman turned from the window and kicked the door shut and seated himself and began pulling off his boots. As a soft tap sounded on the door he extinguished the light.

Hale opened the outside door a crack and listened. Swinging it partly open, he slipped outside on all fours and, bending low, stole barefooted across the road. The spasmodic rumble of night riders came faintly to his ears from the down-town district. As he struck through a cross street toward the Centerville road a horseman came up from behind him and almost ran him down. Muttering some gibberish, which he hoped would pass for drunken Spanish, and staggering slightly, he caught at the rider's stirrup as if to save himself from falling. The rider leaned low and was satisfied with the peaked hat and serape. With a curse and a kick in Hale's ribs he rode on.

Hale entered the Centerville road and had advanced within a fourth of a mile of his pony when he detected mounted figures ahead. He made his way unsteadily toward them and caught the click of guns being cocked. Without any attempt at evasion he held on, talking to himself and walking with drunken steps.

"Damn greaser!" said one of the videttes as he managed to make out the shape of the pointed hat.
"Where you goin'?"

"*Si señor,*" huskily replied Hale.

"Git to hell outer here!" commanded a second picket, kicking at him but missing.

"Hush, fellers! Man on hoss-back!" warned the third.

The three lined up across the road, facing toward the

town, and Hale ran noiselessly along the edge of the woods.

He had no trouble in finding the little gulch and soon was in the saddle and back in the road. He walked the pony until some distance from where he had left the pickets, then sent him into a swift gallop.

It was an hour from sunrise when he slipped from the tired pony and waited for the magic turrets and spires of the hidden mountains to make their brief appearance. He had used up a day in stealing through the foot-hills north of the Payette road to a position above Old Idaho's cabin. From there it had taken much of the night to ride to the gulch. He knew Old Idaho and his granddaughter would not be stirring until the sun was up, as the gulch remained in darkness after the outside world became illuminated.

At last he decided he could enter without depriving the girl of much of her sleep, and he led the pony to the grape-vines and brushed them aside. He all but stepped on the limp form of Miss Harry. With a low cry of fear he scooped her up in his arms, his first thought being that some horrible tragedy had been enacted during his absence. The girl's eyes, staring into his, allayed this fear, and with an embarrassed laugh he stood her on her feet.

"Shoshoni Hale!" she exclaimed. "When did you come?"

Her loyalty in waiting for him at the vines affected him deeply.

"Just arrived. Came near stepping on you."

"I was watching for you the last two nights. I was growing afraid because you did not come."

"And last night you watched far into the night and got tired and sleepy and fell asleep," he added.

"We depend so much on you. What made you so long?"

"Had trouble in finding the specimens. Didn't dare travel here in the day-time."

"You must be hungry, and your face looks black and greasy. I'm glad you're back."

"I never knew how much like home this place seems till I left it."

"What's in the big bundle?"

"I've been buying some clothes."

"You'd look queer except as a mountain man."

"Probably what all my friends will say."

CHAPTER VIII

BACK IN THE GULCH

HALE found Black Cloud in one of his gloomy moods. During the first day the Indian would not converse, but toward the end of the second day Hale learned enough to know it was the old bitterness, the lost medicine, that was causing the misery.

"When I went away I believed my red brother's heart was waking up from its long sleep," Hale told him. "Did not the boy-girl's talk send the morning light into his heart?"

"A big cloud has been over the sun," mournfully answered the Indian. "The boy-girl had no talk for the Shoshoni. She stayed behind the grape-vines, always looking. When I went to her and asked for some medicine talk her spirit was too far away for her to hear me. She stayed there by the vines alone, like a boy going up into the mountains to get his first medicine and name. Her spirit-eyes did not see the Shoshoni; they were on the tops of the hidden mountains. Then Black Cloud heard the evil spirits of this place laughing at him. An owl, that was my uncle, told me I should die soon because I have no medicine."

"The owl was sent by an evil spirit which is a liar," said Hale. "The owl was told to lie to you and make your blood turn to water so you would run away from even a root-and-rabbit-eating Indian. The boy-girl's spirit was far away gathering new strength. A horse and buffalo warrior must not let his heart grow weak.

Now tell me about the old man. He did not act glad to see your white brother."

"He tried to take the kegs of powder from the brush house," Black Cloud insisted. "I hid them in a hole behind the brush house. When I walk to the end of this place I hear whispering. Spirits whisper in my ears that very bad things will happen here."

"They are whispering lies," said Hale. "They try to make you afraid with lies. The girl has not lost her medicine. I have not lost my medicine. My brother will find his soon."

Black Cloud's eyes gleamed with a recrudescence of hope.

"My white brother's medicine took him to the lodge of his enemies. He cried out under the moon and then fired into the lodge and killed them?"

"They had run away. But they will come back. A friend will tell me when they come back. Then I'll count my coup."

Black Cloud was disappointed but did not slip back into despair entirely. Hale's presence buoyed him up. It was plain his despondency was due largely to the girl's abstraction. Had she been less watchful for Hale's return and had entertained the Indian with her fanciful stories his mind would have no room for brooding. Left to his own devices, he permitted his recently acquired optimism to deteriorate rapidly.

Their talk was interrupted by the approach of the girl. The Indian saw her first, and it was his steady staring that attracted Hale's attention to her. Hale had been puzzled and pained by her behaviour for the last two days. She had stayed much with her grandfather and seemed to avoid Hale's company. This aloofness was so opposite to what he had hoped for, after learning how she had watched for his return, that he himself might have fallen a victim to black

moods if not for the necessity of helping the warrior.

Black Cloud grunted softly as he watched the girl come bounding from boulder to boulder or clearing the obstacles with the ease of a deer. Her whole demeanour was that of a child, riotously happy, and from sheer exultation she sought barriers of rock to conquer.

"Her spirit has very strong wings. She has an eagle medicine," muttered the Indian.

Halting before the men and resting her hands on her hips she tilted her head and said:—

"I must talk with you, Shoshoni Hale."

Then to the Indian, to soften his dismissal:—

"It is a medicine talk, Black Cloud. The sunrise told me how to find you a mighty medicine. It is not good for you to know more until I have spoken to your white brother."

His knowledge of English was sufficient for him to follow and grasp the gist of her speech. His powerful chest expanded and he breathed in deep gulps. He had heard an offer of redemption. Hale's face was worried and his eyes angry as he listened to her reckless speech. The girl had as good as promised to restore the warrior's lost medicine; and when the Shoshoni discovered it was only an empty talk there was no foretelling the terrible effect on his superstitious mind. Yet Hale dared not interrupt and minimise the promised benefits. Could he have guessed the girl's purpose he would have prevented her from trifling with the depths of the red man's soul. But the harm was done and Black Cloud was humbly withdrawing, moving backward that he might feast his small eyes on his deliverer.

When they were alone the girl's dimpled face grew mischievous and she peered saucily up into Hale's

grave face, and next indulged in a grotesque mimicry of his expression by thrusting out her small chin and drawing down the corners of her red mouth. But the situation was too serious for Hale to be wheedled out of his displeasure.

"Miss Harry," he sadly rebuked, "it would have been much kinder if you'd shot Black Cloud through the heart. By arousing false hopes you have done him a great hurt."

"My goodness! One would think I was a man-killer," she cried, seizing his arm and swinging her feet clear off the ground. "You must be a very strong man, Shoshoni Hale."

"I thought I had told you enough about the Indian for you to understand that his lost medicine business is more than life or death to him. I thought you realised that, being red, he's far different from us in his ways of thinking."

"Granddaddy finds fault with me, and you scold," she sighed.

"No, no, child! I—I could never scold you. Good heavens! What a notion! I'm simply sorry that Black Cloud should have this new and, for him, terrible disappointment. It'll make him worse'n he has been; and he's pretty low in the mouth as it is."

"All the more reason why his medicine should be found, or made up for," she declared.

"But it's neither found, nor made up for," he regretted.

She put a hand in her blouse and slyly drew forth a small compass and allowed him to see it, then hurriedly restored it.

"I found it among some rubbish above the spring," she whispered.

"Lucky Tom lost it when dumping the rubbish. What about it?"

"It's a part of Black Cloud's medicine," she triumphantly informed.

"What nonsense is this, Miss Harry?" he sternly asked.

"My goodness! If I was a big woman instead of squirrel size you'd never call it 'nonsense.' His medicine has something to do with the stars. He's always staring toward the sky. It was his interest in the sky that made me speak of star-dust medicine to him. I have made a little bag and I'll sew a star on it and fill it with star-dust, only the dust turns to nothing if he begins to open the bag. Poof! It'll all be gone before he can peek in. Shoshoni, this bag and compass ought to be better medicine than a lot of coloured pebbles and a piece of feather."

"The Indian is as sensitive as a child. He never forgets. You've made big promises. If he ever reckons you haven't made good we'll never see him again. And, what's worse, his life will be a terrible sad affair. The red mind is so different from the white that you shouldn't have tried any experiments on it."

"Much obliged. This isn't any experiment," she savagely retorted. "It's a mighty good medicine. I thought you'd be pleased. I did it because he's your friend. But you're like all the rest, I reckon; you don't believe a woman can think up anything worth while."

Her show of spirit made him uneasy. As she drew away, as if to leave him, his concern for the Indian was submerged beneath self-interest.

"Don't go," he said. "I want to talk to you, I've been hungry to talk to you. We're cooped up in this gulch and yet it seems as if we was as far apart as if you was living in Mexico."

"Well, of all the talk!" she upbraided. "Here is poor me dying of lonesomeness, and there's you, stalking

around like a bear with a sore head. I come near you and you run away."

He gaped at her in astonishment.

"Why, Miss Harry," he protested, "has it seemed like that to you? I've been reckoning it was just t'other way." He rubbed his chin and desperately endeavoured to recall a time when he had retreated at her approach.

"Anyway, it's all forgiven if you behave from now on," she generously announced. "Tell me about your trip outside."

She seated herself cross-legged on the ground, clasped her hands about her slim ankles and waited for him to explain.

He sprawled out at full length, gazed up into her face, and answered:—

"My trip outside? To be sure. I went travelling round a trifle and found some lying talk has been set going about me by Patterson and his friends."

"Um! Talk about what?"

"It ain't a talk I like to bring to you. They're telling a most awful lie about me."

"Then every one must know it's a lie. What is it?"

Her tone was sharp and insistent, and he reluctantly replied:—

"They're saying as how I murdered a man—a friend of mine."

"Meaning Lucky Tom, who used to stay in these diggings?"

He nodded. She clenched her hands and smote them together, and denounced:—

"The cowards! They ought to be killed off-hand, like so many snakes!"

"Things are bound to clear up soon," he added. "I've taken steps to have the truth brought out as to how Lucky Tom died."

"Just what have you planned?" she breathlessly asked.

"It's bad medicine to tell ahead," he evaded. "Let's talk about something cheerful."

She wanted to question him for details, but there was that in his sober face that discouraged the desire for the time. She gazed at the toes of her moccasins for half a minute, and the sunshine seemed to leave her face, and her voice was wistful as she finally asked:—

"Would you think me wiser and nicer if I was bigger?"

"Dog-gone!" he muttered. "What a notion!"

"Or if I didn't dress like a boy, but like the girls I saw in Idaho City? I've got some pretty dresses; made 'em myself mostly. But these are handier to move around in out here." And she patted the fringed trousers.

"What fool questions!" he cried.

"But would you?" she persisted, now refusing to meet his gaze.

"No!" He fairly roared.

She ventured on a side glance at him and timidly pleaded:—

"You're not saying that just to make me feel better, Shoshoni?"

"Why, Miss Harry, you leave me plumb flabbergasted! Have you bigger? Good Lord! If you was bigger could you be dainty as cherry blossoms, as light as thistle silk swimming in the wind, as—as—Oh, what's the use! You know what I feel and am trying to say. And as for clothes, I ain't seen you in your t'other togs, but you'd have to be mighty smart to improve on the sensible togs you're wearing."

"Then why did you seem to keep away from me after you got back?"

"Keep away from you?" he growled. "Didn't I

hang around till I felt as meeching as a pup caught stealing milk? Haven't I stuck so close to the cliff that your granddaddy showed his teeth at me? And haven't you gone by with your head turned t'other way like I was p'izen?"

The counter accusation filled her with happiness.

"Now you're nice and I forgive you," she whispered. "I ain't awfully well civilised, I reckon, and I don't know just how the Idaho City girls would act in my place. But I've always had the notion that a girl should never look to be chasing a man."

"You'd never have to chase any man," he whispered, his hand timidly touching her arm.

"Tell me some more," she murmured, allowing her fingers to close about his wrist.

His eyes blinked and he forced himself to shift his gaze to the figure of the Indian up the gulch. For a count of ten he looked on his red friend, while the girl waited. Suddenly withdrawing his hand he leaped to his feet and caught her by the wrists and helped her to stand erect. Then, stepping back, he mumbled:—

"Miss Harry, I'm mighty proud that you don't mind my company—that you're willing to talk with me. I've got a little bit of trouble to clear up and then when that's finished I reckon I'm going to be a regular talker."

She stared at him in astonishment and anger, an anger rising from a sense of shame. She breathed rapidly as the new emotions overwhelmed her, and her voice was unsteady as she advised:—

"When you get to be a famous talker you can talk to Pinaquana, or the Indian."

With that she ran toward the spring where her granddaddy was using the pick on the gulch wall.

"Well, I'll be darned if I know what's the matter with her," muttered Hale. "Prospecting for love is harder'n chasing diamonds. Yet it can't be she's mad

at me, as I've given her no cause to be. Besides, she's that tender and wonderful. And a woman can't change in a flash like that." He ruminated the last thoughtfully and suddenly decided; "But that's just what she done!"

Bewildered by the girl's behaviour and unable to comprehend the cause, he slowly walked after her. As he drew near the spring she moved on up the gulch. He would have followed, thereby, perhaps, redeeming himself in her estimation, if it had not been for Old Idaho's appearance of guilt. He had done something, or was about to do something, which he did not want Hale to observe. His sly eyes, his hurried move to throw a blanket over some object, put Hale on his guard.

Since his return from destroying the spelter mill Hale had talked scarcely any with the old man. Nor had Idaho's behaviour invited conversation. After hearing Hale's terse report about the destruction of the mill he had turned his back. It was as if he regretted his benefactor's return and looked upon him as an interloper. Hale might have weighed this deportment more shrewdly had he not been concerned over the girl's seeming desire to avoid him. Now he took time to study the old man.

Idaho tried to pretend he did not mind being watched and became busy with the spring pole. But, although there was plenty of rich rock about the stream running from the spring Hale knew the weighted pole had not been used since his return. Idaho had, however, industriously used the pick on the cliff and broken a hole a half-foot deep in the wall. This penetration was possible because of the weathered condition of the rock. Ignoring Hale's presence, he picked up a drill and commenced sinking a hole some five feet from the ground.

" What's the idea of that, Idaho ? " asked Hale.

" Want to test for colour," mumbled the old man.

" You can't git any rock out the face of the cliff after you git through the rotten rock."

" Just curious to see if there's a hidden vein in there," was the gruff reply.

" If it doesn't show on the face you're wasting time and strength. If one does show you can make better money picking up the loose stuff. You can't chip out anything that'll amount to much. If you don't git after this quartz around the spring I'll be gitting it myself."

This good-natured threat brought the old man about, his whole attitude breathing malevolence.

" Shoshoni Hale," he informed him, " this is my gulch. You're welcome to decent pay for fetching Harry'n me here. You're welcome to good pay for going back and wiping out that little mill of mine. But we ain't partners; just remember that. You name what you think's a fair price. If it's within reason I'll pay up, and you can go your way."

Hale's love for the humorous made it difficult for him to hide his smile. Speaking sternly, he said :—

" Nonsense, Idaho. You may have wandered in here when you were chasing lost cattle, but you didn't know what you had found until you got to Oregon. And then you couldn't find this place again. But we won't argue over the gold. I've got more important things to think about. All you git together will go to Miss Harry. I'd rather see her have it than any one. As my life has panned out I don't need much more gold than Black Cloud does. As for leaving here you forgit I might run into lots of trouble. And if I go the Indian goes with me. Who would bring in game for you and keep a watch on the outside ? "

Old Idaho was not prepared to answer. With the

exception of a bag of flour they had exhausted all the provisions originally brought into the gulch, and the greater part of their living had depended upon the Indian's hunting expeditions. Old Idaho would have been as vexed to have the Indian go as he was disgruntled at having Hale remain. He smoothed his beard as if the stroking of his hand likewise smoothed out the kinks in his mind and, in an effort to be amiable, he declared :—

" We're happy in here. No quarrelling. No reason why we can't keep it up. If I seem fretful at times it's just my way. As to the gold I'm willing to be a little more'n fair. And, as you say, you don't need much."

" We'll let it go at that," agreed Hale.

Then he removed the blanket that concealed a keg of powder. Without a word he went to the hole back of the brush-shelter and discovered the other two kegs were missing. Returning to Old Idaho, he demanded :—

" Where's the two kegs? Quick! I want 'em."

" It's my powder to use as I see fit and——"

" You madman! You're reckoning on blasting that cliff. Haven't you sense enough to know this gulch will be our grave if you shoot a single blast in that wall? You're drilling that hole to fill with powder! If you don't care about yourself, don't you care about the girl?"

" It's all a derned lie about any danger from a blast," hoarsely defended the old man. " The teeny blast I'd set off wouldn't amount to shucks. There's a solid river of gold inside that cliff and I want to have it out. I'm too old to spend time picking up crumbs when I can have a whole loaf at a whack."

" And three weeks ago you were making bogus dust because you couldn't find the crumbs," sternly replied

Hale. "Where's the powder?" He picked up the keg and carried it back to the shelter.

Idaho rebelled and fumed for a while, then sulkily led the way to where it was cached in the gravel at the foot of the cliff. Hale opened the kegs and, ignoring Idaho's frantic cries, spilled the powder into the rivulet flowing from the spring.

"Damn you for that, Hale!" panted the old man. "Don't you fret but what I'll git the loose stuff. And some day, when you ain't snooping 'round, I'll tap the big vein. It's in there, and you know it. You plan to keep me busy picking up small stuff, a-thinking you'll open up this cliff. But you won't. The big vein's in there and so pure you can cut it with a knife; but it won't be Shoshoni Hale's knife that cuts it."

"Your cursing won't do so much mischief as a blast will do," replied Hale. "Can't you understand that if you touch off a charge in that cliff you'll bury this gulch and every one in it till the last trump sounds? As to cutting out gold, you're thinking of ruby silver. You'll find none of that in these diggings. If there's any quartz in that wall it doesn't show on the face. But if there's oceans of it there you'd have to pick it out mighty careful or find yourself under a few million ton of rock. And if you could pick it out you'd have to have a stamp mill. There's more of it loose underfoot than you can ever break up with a sledge-hammer."

Old Idaho made no more talk but set to work using the spring-pole. Sorry that the old man's obsession should take such a disagreeable trend, Hale started to overtake the girl, but she hurried on the faster until he was convinced he was as unwelcome in her eyes as he was in her grandfather's. He ceased his pursuit and went to the Indian and briefly explained his belief that a talking paper might be waiting for him or his messenger under the doorstep of Idaho's cabin.

"When the sky serpent runs along the top of the rocks your red brother will go for it," said Black Cloud, meaning when the last rays of the setting sun set the rim of the cliffs to blazing.

Miss Harry returned from up the gulch soon after the Indian had taken his departure. If she missed him she asked no questions but busied herself in preparing the evening meal. Her grandfather sat apart, lost in moody meditations, and his glance was far from kindly when he looked at Hale. The meal was a failure from a social point of view. Depressed in spirits, Hale made no efforts at conversation. Instead of the usual evening chat he retired early to his brush shelter and went to sleep. When he awoke, the Indian was by his side and the glow in the east was sifting over the top of the cliffs.

"You found the talking paper?" asked Hale.

"There was no talking paper. My brother's medicine is weak," answered the Indian. "When Black Cloud's medicine gets strong it will bring the paper."

The morning passed with the girl working industriously with her grandfather. Hale would have enjoyed helping them but feared his motive would be misconstrued. He wandered alone to the upper end of the gulch, Pinaquana trotting after him. When the sun was sending perpendicular heat rays down into the gulch he turned back to get something to eat. Before he reached the brush shelter an arrow finished its graceful flight and stuck in the gravel at his feet.

Hale jerked up his head and beheld Old Idaho running from the overhanging cliff, long rifle in hand. Beyond him, coming from the mouth of the corridor, was the Indian. For Hale's benefit he was running from side to side, making the signal for "discovery." Leaping on to the mare's back, Hale rode swiftly down to the fire-hole. To Old Idaho he said:—

"Enemies are near! Keep the girl in under the cliff. The Cloud and I will stand them off."

Leaping from the mare, he ran to where the Indian was standing.

"White men near the grape-vines," was Black Cloud's guttural report.

Hale pulled his guns and felt the old dread of his unknown trackers tugging at his heart and making it weak. How many times had he given ground when he had had reason to believe his implacable, relentless enemies were about to discover him! But this was the first time he had found himself cornered. Then came the reassuring thought that for once they must meet him face to face.

"How many?" he snapped over his shoulder to the Indian, who was close to his heels, his bow and arrow ready for instant use.

The Indian held up two fingers. Hale slowed down, perplexed.

"Then it can't be Danites or a posse," he muttered.

"Very sly like the fox. Bend down like this." And the Indian crouched low and moved from side to side.

"Must be scouts sent out by a posse. They're hunting for signs of my trail. You keep back, Black Cloud. If they're after me I'll sneak out and lead them a chase to the river."

"My brother's friend will go with him and watch the chase," replied the Indian; and Hale knew it would be useless to argue the matter.

They entered the long passage-way and stole to the thick screen, expecting to encounter an intruder at every step. No one had passed through the vines, however, and when they reached the curtain and looked out they could see no one. The Indian grunted softly and murmured something about evil spirits. Then he whispered:—

"There were two of them. Just beyond the broken rock."

Hale drew a revolver and settled himself to wait. At last a hat appeared and then a head. The man was near enough to be recognised, and Hale was relieved to find he did not answer the description of either Mushet or Burnham. As he backed out around the rocks he bent low and examined the ground. The head of another man showed; and as he came into view and imitated the other's peculiar behaviour, the Shoshoni whispered:

"Old-chief-who-keeps-the-presents."

This characterisation could apply only to Governor Lyon, who had failed to turn over to the Idaho Indians some fifty thousand dollars of the Federal appropriation. Entirely relaxed, Hale watched the two for several minutes, then chuckled softly, and told himself:—

"Derned if the two fools ain't hunting for diamonds! T'other chap must be Fogus, Lyon's partner."

He whispered as much to Black Cloud. The men were carrying large buckskin bags into which they dropped the glittering bits of rock. And as they worked they kept a close watch on the broken country stretching north to the Payette. The Indian saw nothing amusing in the intrusion, and warned:—

"Hunt for diamonds, find gold maybe."

He stuck two arrows in the ground and began testing his bow.

"No! That would be murder. They'll be going back soon. Even if they're followed and discovered we won't be found."

The barrel of a long rifle slipped under Hale's arm and through the vines. Hale shoved one hand under the hammer and with the other caught the brown barrel and forced the weapon back. Black Cloud seized Old Idaho and dragged him into the passage-way, with one hand over his mouth to prevent any outcry.

Hale followed with the old man's gun. When they had regained the gulch Hale sternly reprimanded him :—

" You came near doing murder."

" No murder to kill skunks that's following me," passionately cried Idaho.

" They're not following either you or me. They are Governor Lyon and a miner called Fogus. They're hunting for diamonds."

" Lyon after di'mon's!" exclaimed the old man. " The man all Idaho City's talking about hunts di'mon's here! And the fools said he'd go to Owyhee!"

" And they're wasting their time," amended Hale.

" A governor of this territory a wasting his time on a fool's business?" jeered Idaho. " You know better!"

" Then believe the landslide out there is filled with diamonds," Hale wearily retorted.

" You don't know to the contrary. When I was in Idaho City wasn't the town plumb crazy over Lyon and di'mon's? Didn't I hear men tell about Idaho di'mon's fetching a thousand dollars'n more for one stone? Little, teeny stones at that!"

His eyes were wolfish as he told this.

" Plenty of gold, but no diamonds," said Hale firmly. " We must keep quiet till those two finish prospecting and go back."

" What if they're followed?" asked the girl at his elbow.

" Then all the more reason for laying low, Miss Harry."

" All the more reason to believe there's di'mon's out there!" panted Old Idaho, his cupidity leaping from gold to precious stones. " A parcel of men wouldn't be chasing round out here less there was some show of finding what they're after."

"I want to go and look at them," said the girl.

"You'd best stay here," said Hale.

"Oh, I'm not afraid. They're not after me," she said with a smile.

She darted for the passage-way. Hale stared after her, his gray-green eyes hard and cold. For a moment he was tempted to go outside and demonstrate to her that he could answer for himself. Common sense rescued him from this touch of madness. Almost by the time he had regained his self-control the girl was back, her hands outstretched. He looked at her in silence and made no offer to accept her hands. She halted before him and pleaded:—

"Say that you don't mind. I was ugly to say that. And I haven't been to the grape-vines. I will not look out. It's best I stay here as you said."

"Forget all about it," said Hale. "Words don't hurt any."

But words do hurt, hurt worse than blows; and even while he spoke he writhed under her implication that he was remaining concealed because he feared the intruders. Let her be ever so remorseful, he could not oust the thought that she had been doubting his courage. She had talked about shadows. She was now imagining him to be hiding from his old fears. And it was a cruel truth that in a moment of weakness he had been afraid.

Old Idaho brusquely announced:—

"You may boss the girl but you can't boss me. If any one's picking up di'mon's on my property I reckon to know it. I'm going to have a look at them."

"Go ahead," surrendered Hale. "Git us all captured. Fill the gulch up with Ferd Patterson's friends."

This sobered the old man more than any opposition could have done. More civilly he said:—

"I'll leave my rifle. I'll be as still as a mouse in a meal-bag."

Hale walked away to pet Pinaquana; the girl remained where he had left her. The Indian followed the old man to the passage-way, then turned back to join his friend. The girl intercepted him and produced a small buckskin bag sealed at the top with many stitches and having a five-pointed star outlined on one side. As the Indian beheld it his eyes dilated and his high cheek-bones glistened with perspiration. He stared as one in a trance while the girl produced a length of rawhide and ran it through the stout loop at the top of the bag. Holding it up, she softly said:—

"There is a good spirit in this place. He is much stronger than all the evil spirits. He lives in a house of glass and brass and always points his medicine-arrow toward the north. He told me to make this bag and after leaving it open for one night to sew it up without looking inside. I believe it is filled with star-dust. It is stronger than the medicine that Black Cloud lost, but it will become nothing if it is opened."

The Indian sounded a guttural shout for Hale to come and literally interpret the girl's words. He had caught the meaning of all she had said, but her speech being medicine must be translated in detail. Hale joined them, displeased that the girl had assumed the risk of making a medicine for the Shoshoni, yet realising the matter had proceeded too far for him to do aught than bid. So he slowly and solemnly interpreted her fanciful speech.

When he finished the Indian accepted the bag and slipped the thong around his neck. As he felt the medicine resting on his iron chest a new light shone in his small eyes. He did not attempt to speak but stood with his two hands stretched toward the northern sky-line.

While he was thus emphasising his ecstasy the girl produced the small compass and held it for him to take. Slowly his hands sank to seize the instrument. The intense focus of his gaze was that of one staring at a fetish. The needle swam and bobbed up and down a bit, then settled down to its eternal business of pointing toward the north. With a tremendous intake of the breath the Indian tucked it inside his hunting-shirt and without a word snatched up a blanket. The sun was hot, yet he muffled his tall form head to foot and walked up the gulch.

" You've either made him or killed him," whispered Hale. " I was fearing he had seen a compass among the road-builders."

" What if he has? It was not his compass. It will merely convince him the white people know a strong medicine and carry it. Shoshoni Hale, do you really reckon there's any danger of those men finding the entrance to this place?"

" I don't know. If they're followed by a crowd of spying diamond hunters some one's likely to find us."

" Isn't there some other place we could hide in if we need to?"

" Yes. On the east slope of Notched Butte near Little Wood River is the opening to a lava cave. The cave's very large and dry. It's fully four hundred feet long by some thirty feet wide. But to git there without being seen would be harder than gitting down here. It's quite a distance, but it could be made by night travel. It's a safe place. I came on it by accident. A small piece of the roof had fallen in. I don't believe either red or white man ever entered it. It's a ten-foot drop if you don't use a rope. Another place is the north-east side of Big Butte, where there's a good spring, the only water to be found in many miles around during the summer. No one goes there as no one

knows where the spring is. Black Cloud showed it to me."

"The last is the best," she said. "The cave sounds cold and dark."

"But I don't reckon we're going to be found out in this gulch, Miss Harry. There's no sign those fellows have been followed. They won't find any diamonds and won't come back."

"We're good friends, Shoshoni?"

"The best of friends, if you'll let me say it, Miss Harry."

"I had a funny feeling when I gave that medicine bag to Black Cloud. Seemed if something was going to happen."

"Something always happens."

"This seemed to be bad luck."

"Then I'm sorry for Black Cloud."

"Not bad luck for him. In my mind I can see him riding at the head of mounted Indians and looking very brave."

"Surely not for yourself?" he fiercely asked; for environment and loneliness had given a streak of superstition to his make-up.

"No; not for myself." Then hurriedly: "Nor for you. Seemed to be granddaddy. But that's foolishness, of course."

"Just nervousness," he declared.

Hale looked toward his friend, still muffled in the thick blanket. There was nothing in the solitary figure to suggest leadership. Riding at the head of mounted redskins, eh? It was a queer conceit, and yet the girl saw things in the heavens that none else saw. She heard voices among the insects, in the whistle of the hot wind and in the overflowing spring, that even Black Cloud never heard. It was not for him to say what she saw or failed to see.

The girl, as impulsive as she was honest, fell to wondering if she could lead the big fellow back to that threshold of sentiment which he had almost crossed. Before she could make the trial Old Idaho returned and disconsolately cried out:—

“They’re gone away. I didn’t see hide or hair of ‘em. Just dug out for good.”

“Come! That’s good,” said Hale, brightening.

“Not much good if it means they know there ain’t any di’mon’s out there,” peevishly replied the old man. “And it ain’t much good if it means they’ve scooped ‘em all up.”

“There are no diamonds in this locality, Idaho,” declared Hale.

Old Idaho looked at him cunningly. Of course Shoshoni Hale would say that. Knowing that the gold in Lucky Gulch was another’s by discovery, he would wish to secure the diamonds for himself. If the two stealthy prospectors had failed to find any precious stones would they be giving up their search so early? The old man answered himself with a strong negative. But once they found their quest was successful they would hasten back to avoid being found on their “diamond diggings.” He knew what they were up to; they were gone to secure a supply of food, and soon they would be returning to gather the treasure.

The old man walked through the twilight to the spring. His dull eyes did not brighten as he looked at the hole in the cliff. The spring pole and sledge aroused no enthusiasm. Oro Fino gold was assaying sixteen dollars to the ounce. Boise seldom assayed less than fifteen, at which price the Idaho City merchants had agreed to accept it, although paying only ten dollars an ounce for Owyhee, and twelve for Florence. Lucky Gulch would run eighteen to the ounce, Hale had once said.

But even at that price it was little better than gravel when one considered the huge values packed in a diamond. Had not Lyon sold a "teeny" one for five hundred dollars? Then again one did not have to break the back and bark the fingers in pounding up rock in order to secure diamonds. Gathering diamonds was no more arduous than picking salmon-berries. These were some of the old man's dream thoughts as he walked up the gulch and with lack-lustre eyes gazed on the rich diggings.

He passed, without seeing him, another dreamer; but Black Cloud's visions encompassed that which is more precious than gold or gems—leadership. His confidence in the new medicine supplied by the boy-girl was superb; and he was infinitely exalted above Old Idaho's plane of sordid greed. He saw himself at the head of many braves, painted and armed for war, with comely women of his race crossing his path, eager to keep his teepee swept clean and to cook his food. Instead of life ended he visioned a future wherein walked many a descendant, walking bravely and filling a high place, and yet ever looking back to Black Cloud as a pattern to be followed.

And the young man hurrying away from the maid had his dream, and it was not of wealth, nor power. Twice he had been tempted that day by her sweet willingness to be wooed. Because she was young and fair to look upon, and because she was the most wonderful creation he could ever contemplate, the conviction was born in his soul that he must keep out of her path until there were no shadows at his heels.

It was early morning when Hale was aroused from his sleep by the girl's shrill voice calling his name. There was trouble in her cry, and grabbing his hand guns he crawled from the brush shelter. From up the gulch came the war-cry of the Shoshoni people, for Black

Cloud, sleeping alone to be nearer his medicine, also had heard the clear voice. Hale saw her a few rods from her brush shelter and she was alone, and there was nothing to disturb the serenity of the place. Pinaquana, an unfailing barometer when danger was near, was placidly grazing.

"What is it, Miss Harry?" Hale called out.

"He's gone, Shoshoni! He's gone with his rifle!" she cried. "Granddaddy's gone! He must have left the gulch in the night."

"Don't fret. He's just outside somewhere. I'll soon fetch him back," he promised. "Just set out some grub while I saddle the mare."

CHAPTER IX

THE TALKING PAPER

HALE ate hurriedly and then led Pinaquana through the passage-way to where the girl was impatiently waiting behind the vines. The girl was not deeply worried, now that Hale had assured her that her grandfather must be near the gulch. He had not taken a horse and it was plain to both that his imprudent excursion had been impelled by his desire to indulge in secret prospecting for diamonds.

"So don't you bother your head about him any more," Hale told her as he made ready to pass through the curtain. "He's within a quarter of a mile of here; probably just around the shoulder of the slide. It got to gnawing at his mind when he saw those two men picking over the loose rocks yesterday. He doesn't know anything about diamonds, but he believes he can slip out and pick up a pint or two before breakfast."

"I'll be waiting for you here like I did the other time; only now I won't go to sleep," she said.

"You'd best go back and keep the Indian from gitting blue," he advised. "He ain't awfully well acquainted with his new medicine yet. It may take some time to locate your granddaddy, as he could hide behind any pile of rocks, and I won't find him till I happen upon him. If he sees me coming he'll lie snug, not caring to come back till he's made a discovery."

She shook hands with him and he passed through the vines and commenced his search. Pinaquana pressed

closely at his heels, trying to keep her muzzle on his shoulder, and more than once he rebuked her and solemnly promised he was not trying to desert her. Owing to the rocky nature of the ground, it was impossible to pick up a trail unless Idaho had wandered clear of the slide.

For half an hour Hale searched the rocks, frequently mounting a boulder to enlarge his range of vision. Sometimes a black shadow at the base of a mound would fool him for a moment. Disgusted at his failure, he left the rocky area and mounted the mare. He rode around the fan-shaped slide, keeping at a distance and searching in vain for traces of the runaway. The sun-baked earth precluded any sign being left by a traveller afoot. The shod hoofs of the mare scarcely left a mark.

The wide half-circle was finally completed. It had taken considerable time and had invited discovery by any strangers happening to be in that vicinity. Hale had taken the mare along to guard against a possible surprise. If strangers saw him he planned to ride away and divert attention from the gulch. But so far as he could determine he had the desolate country entirely to himself; and after two hours of searching he galloped back to the entrance. Pinaquana in a low whinny told him the girl was just beyond the vines.

Eagerly dismounting, Hale parted the vines and confronted her. Her small face was deeply troubled.

"I saw you coming back alone," she said.

"He must have worked 'way round the mountains and scooted up some box cañon on the north side," he cheerfully suggested. "He'll be back soon."

"I'm afraid he has wandered farther'n that. I must go after him," she said.

"Great snakes, Miss Harry! That would be the biggest piece of foolishness you could do. I can find

him all right, but there's one inside who can beat all creation at that kind of work. I'll send Black Cloud out. He'll be keen to exercise his new medicine. If white men meet him they won't suspect anything about this gulch. He can go anywhere without being troubled, even to Boise City or to Idaho City. Nothing disagreeable has happened to your granddaddy. He's where he wants to be. But the Indian can find him before you could even git started. We'll git inside and put him to work."

She went back with him but did not react to his optimism as he had hoped. In his heart he was greatly worried over the old man's disappearance. He feared that Idaho had left early in the night and had become confused and had walked off a ledge or fallen into a hole. The box cañon on the north side of the mountains was his invention to quiet the girl's anxiety.

They found the Indian seated by the fire-hole. During their absence he had eaten all the food left by Hale and had painted his face and chest. He was polishing his rifle when they came up. Hale knew the man was demanding action, whether it be war or travel. New blood filled his veins and his bearing was haughty, almost imperious, as his two friends joined him.

"My red brother's medicine is very strong," saluted Hale. Although the Indian knew Old Idaho was missing and that Hale had been abroad he would make no inquiry. He proudly informed:—

"The new medicine floats the Black Cloud over very high places. It makes his eyes see as far as the eagle's."

"It is good. The medicine shall work for the boy-girl. The old one has wandered away like a foolish horse. Your white brother has been outside and used his weak eyes and found no signs. Let Black Cloud's medicine-eyes find the trail. I have not told the boy-girl what I think; the old one has either fallen into

a hole, or has started for the cabin on the river road. If alive he must be brought back here before white men find him."

"If white men have found him?" grunted Back Cloud.

"Then they will take him to Idaho City. Your medicine will tell you to be sly like a fox and not try to take him from there. You must have no trouble with the whites. Bring him back if you find him alone. If you see him with white men do not go near him, but find my friend in Idaho City. I will send a talking paper to him. He will send word back to me."

"Make the talking paper. The Black Cloud goes for his pony."

As he hastened to find his pony the girl anxiously asked:—

"What did you say, Shoshoni?"

"Told him to keep going till he finds your grand-daddy. Better trail along after him till he gits his pony. He knows you are big medicine."

Not at all satisfied that she had received the full truth from Hale, for he had talked at some length to the Indian and had mentioned Idaho City, she readily followed Black Cloud for the purpose of questioning him. Hale would have smiled sardonically had he guessed her purpose, for to interrogate the Indian under the circumstances would be no more resultful than to talk to the towering cliffs.

He was pleased to have her leave him, however, as it afforded him a chance to write a few lines to Jack Gorman. Finishing his message, he went to the mouth of the gulch and waited for the girl and the Indian. When they came the Indian was mounted and carrying himself very erect one moment and leaning from the saddle and humbly listening to the girl in the next. Almost in tears the girl complained:—

"He doesn't seem to understand any English, Shoshoni. Yesterday I thought he understood me. You talk to him."

Hale rapidly informed Black Cloud he would give him the white man's name when they were alone. The Indian replied :—

"The boy-girl asks many things. Tell her my medicine says I shall find what I hunt."

Hale repeated this to the girl and added :—

"He wants you to remain here. Some foolishness about making his medicine weak if a woman goes any farther. I'll go as far as the vines and be right back."

With this amiable falsehood he and the Indian took to the passage-way. Arriving at the vines he handed over the note and repeated Gorman's name until Black Cloud could pronounce it intelligibly. Without further speech they parted.

Hale found the girl seated on a rock, her chin in her hands. She was much downcast and greatly to be pitied. Hale stared at the forlorn little figure in silence and wildly wondered what he could say. She spoke first and with the artlessness of a child said :—

"I might have known it couldn't last. This living here where everything is so peaceful and quiet."

"It's only a makeshift," he agreed, seating himself. "Even if there wasn't anything in our medicine to stop it from lasting you'd git tired of it. The gulch always remains the same, but you're different every day. What suits to-day won't interest you to-morrow. Trouble here is there isn't anything to do."

She glanced at him quickly and in an odd little voice rebuked :—

"So you're tired of it as well as granddaddy. A woman's pleased with peace and quiet. A man wants fights and trouble. Granddaddy's old. He's always dreamed of being rich. Here's enough gold to satisfy

even a young man with his whole life before him. Now granddaddy hasn't any more use for gold. He must have diamonds. He looks ahead and forgets he's old and wants more, more, more! That's the way with men."

"Bless you, Miss Harry! A man ain't shucks compared with a woman," he readily agreed.

She scornfully retorted:—

"If I believed that I'd never say it, if I was a man. Why shouldn't a man be as worth while as a woman? That talk is silly."

He rubbed his chin and meekly assented:—

"Reckon it is."

"Don't agree with everything I say, like a sheep."

"It would take a heap of spunk to disagree to anything you say, Miss Harry. But come! Let's not be down on our luck. The Indian will be kiting back here in no time with your granddaddy slung across his saddle! And everything will be happy again."

"It can't be the same again," she quietly replied. "Now he's quit the gulch others will be quitting. That medicine I gave the Indian told me something would happen. Bad luck. Sounds foolish. Of course I don't believe in Indian medicine. I must have been stupid when we first came here, or I'd have known we couldn't stay."

Hale leaped to his feet and cried:—

"Come on! Let's give our medicine a chance. Your granddaddy's coming back with a long face. He can't find any diamonds. He'll fret about the time lost from working the placer. He'll be wishing he had more gold. Let's pan out some for him."

"But it's your gold," she reminded him. "In talking with him you never say 'our' gold, even let alone 'my' gold. But it *is* your gold. We'll not forget that no matter how granddaddy carries on."

"Oh, there's enough for all of us. The thing is to git a few bags filled with dust while waiting for the Indian to fetch him back."

He realised the girl needed some mental distraction. Placer mining would serve admirably. In her zeal to rival his efforts the colour soon heightened in her brown cheeks, and she scrambled over the rocks with the agility of a boy. She brought the most promising rock to the natural mortar and Hale soon reduced it with the weighted spring pole, so that the gold could be washed out. Before she could tire of this phase of the work he suggested they pan from the gravel. The sun crossed the midday line before she knew it. Even then he did not permit her to become melancholy but talked about his appetite and helped her set out the food which had been cooked the evening before. While they ate he rapidly outlined plans for excavating the gravel around the spring and insisted they should find some rare nuggets deep in the wash.

Never before had Shoshoni Hale suspected his gift of speech. His words tumbled over each other and amazed the girl even in her perturbed state of mind. But endeavour as he would he could not keep her thoughts from swinging back to the thing that worried her. Two tears trembled on the long lashes. She rose hurriedly that he might not observe her weakness and went in under the hanging cliff. He pretended not to notice and filled and lighted his pipe. Very soon she was back, exhibiting a forced gaiety and declaring her readiness to wash the few dishes and then take up their search for nuggets.

They worked hard throughout the afternoon, with neither speaking of the thought uppermost in their minds—the prolonged absence of the Indian. Had Old Idaho taken a horse it would have been easier to understand Black Cloud's failure to find him; but

why should one of the best trailers in the Upper Country be so long in overhauling a man on foot, and an old man at that? And yet, reasoned Hale to himself, if anything serious had happened to the old man the Indian would be back with word to that effect.

The new gravel contributed generously to their stock of dust but produced nothing phenomenal. At dusk Hale threw down his pan and announced:—

“We’ll knock off and have some hot victuals to eat.”

“You won’t wait till they come?” she softly asked.

“I can, but I’m starving. We’ll git things ready.”

The food was cooked and eaten and they took their places beside the fire-hole and threw on fuel until the flames leaped high and drove back the evening chill.

“Well, they haven’t come yet,” remarked the girl wearily.

“Hiding up snug and tighter till it gits darker,” encouraged Hale.

The girl became silent and stared at the fire. Hale smoked his pipe out and refilled it and covertly watched her sad face. Late in the evening she straightened back and repeated:—

“Well, they haven’t come yet.”

“They’ve had too far to travel. They’ll be here with the sun.”

“I hope so,” she murmured, rising. “Good-night. I think I’ll try to sleep.”

“Good-night, and do sleep,” he gently urged, his heart aching at her silent misery.

He feared the shelter of the leaning cliff would bring weeping instead of slumber; and he was enraged at his helplessness. Taking his blankets, he traversed the corridor and made his bed behind the vines. The mare came after him, but he sent her back.

The dawn failed to bring either Old Idaho or the

Indian. The girl said nothing, but the tightly compressed red lips told of repressed emotion. Hale was at loss how to comfort her and talked but little. He took the pan and mechanically washed out some gold beside the overflowing spring. She came and watched him, but made no effort to supplement his labours. Both were waiting.

At midday he went back to the flat rock and found some cold meat and bread awaiting him, but the girl was not in sight. Seized with a sudden fear, he whistled for the mare to follow him and plunged into the narrow passage-way. The relief of finding her crouched behind the vines left him weak. She had been weeping and averted her head. He awkwardly said :—

“ They’ll be here soon.”

She made no reply and masked her face by pressing it into the vines. He shifted his position and turned to go back, then hesitated. He felt he was not wanted and yet feared it would smack of indifference if he left her. He was sadly puzzled to know just what a man should do to comfort a disconsolate female.

Finally he started back, driving the disappointed mare before him, and picked his way softly as if fearing to disturb her. He had covered half the corridor when a low cry stayed his steps.

The cry was repeated, this time louder ; and he ran to her side and stared through the vines. A bobbing black dot was weaving in and out over the broken ground. In a husky whisper she said :—

“ A man on a horse ! ”

Hale squinted up his eyes. It was a horseman, but he did not dare offer any hope. They waited and watched the dot expand and take on shape.

“ It’s Black Cloud,” announced Hale, trying to make his voice sound ordinary. “ I can’t tell if he has your granddaddy riding before him.”

"He comes alone," she muttered.

The rider suddenly became visible, his pony scrambling over the rough ground with the sure-footedness of a mountain sheep. The girl's vision had not deceived her: Black Cloud rode alone and he was riding furiously. With frequent glances behind him he drew nearer the entrance and slipped from his panting mount. Leading the pony, he hurried to the vines and entered.

"You didn't find him. Your medicine wasn't strong enough," was the girl's greeting.

"Idaho City. Good," he told her. Then in the Shoshoni tongue he explained to Hale: "The old one is locked up in the strong lodge of the white men. One of the men, who was picking over rocks outside here, found him walking toward the river. Old-chief-who-keeps-the-presents had just gone on ahead to Idaho City. The man who found the old one knew he was wanted by the white men, and he put him on a horse and took him to Idaho City. Black Cloud's medicine took him to Idaho City as swift as the west wind. White men made very much talk about the old one in the strong lodge. Some talked very angry. Other white men talked only of shining stones and forgot all about the old one. I found the man called Gorman, my brother's friend, and gave him the talking paper. He gave me a paper to bring here."

"Give it to me when we are alone," broke in Hale. "She must not know yet that he is the white men's prisoner." To the girl he said: "Just what he told you. Your granddaddy went back to the Payette, got a horse somewhere and rode to Idaho City. All he thinks about is diamonds. Leave me talk with the Indian alone, as I will have to question him to git facts and it's a hard job even when I have him alone."

She shook her head as if fathoming his deceit and dejectedly went down the passage-way. When she turned

the corner of the corridor Black Cloud produced a folded sheet of paper, and opening it Hale read :—

“ Big news. Curks and three men are here. Came in from Boise just ahead of your Injun. Old Idaho fetched in by Fogus, who was out with Lyon, prospecting for diamonds on the sly. Town wild over diamonds. Curks and *the three* planning with Bowen to get into the game.

“ O. I. is locked up but is treated well. Something behind it all we on the street don’t quite understand. Believe Patterson is trying to find out where the girl is and will offer O. I. his liberty if he’ll tell. I know the sheriff has told him he can be lynched for passing bogus dust. He probably added that Patterson is the only one who can save him, P. being the main witness against him. One of the boys tells me O. I. isn’t a bit afraid.

“ Reckon they’ll try to make out a sure case against him by making him tell where he has hidden his no-good dust. They reckon he has lots of it stored up somewhere. Reckon he’s guilty all right. If they make out a sure case against him he’ll have to tell what they want to know, or take his chances with a mob. Riply and the others can’t do anything if they prove it on him. For they’ve cursed the sheriff for not doing his duty and they curse him if he does. The men who are forming a committee won’t lynch him but will turn him over to the law. If he’s lynched it’ll be by a Gold Dust Saloon mob, making believe to be vigilants.

“ I’m told O. I. is raving about diamonds. Some think he’d found them and ought to be kept alive. Fogus says he’s crazy ; talked crazy on the ride in. But Fogus doesn’t want any one to believe in diamonds if he and Lyon have found any.

“ I’m spreading word he’s crazy and has been crazy

for a long time. If you can find out from the girl where he has his no-good dust cached send the Injun to remove it. Patterson's crowd will find it sure if it's left where he hid it. Curks and the three are working in this with P. Third man is Weber Joe. Be sure and let me know ahead when you're coming so I can sit in.—J. G."

Hale trembled violently as he finished reading the message and tucked it into a deep crevice in the rocks. "Weber Joe!" Now that he knew the names of the three he believed the long trail was about to end. From below the Snake it had started to pursue a boy. It had wound among the foot-hills and over the mountains. For long intervals it had remained broken, only to be picked up just as he was growing to believe the menace could never trail him again.

But to know their names! Weber Joe, Tod Mushet, West Burnham. Names instead of shadows! For the first time he was turning about face and ready to go down the trail to meet them. And the trail would end, whether it be he or the sons of Dan who crossed over the rim of the basin. The realisation filled him with ferocious enthusiasm. Then he remembered Gorman's objection to a wholesale elimination of his enemies. One must be spared to confess the truth about Lucky Tom's death.

To the Indian Hale rapidly explained:—

"I am a hunted man. There is a price on my scalp. Bad men say I killed a friend. Pretty soon I shall try to kill them, but one I shall let go so he may tell who did kill my friend. The bad men know who killed my friend. I may be killed. If I am I want you to see any of the bad men left alive and make them speak with a straight tongue."

"They shall speak," assured Black Cloud, hissing like a snake. "Your red brother remembers how to make

men talk. We will bring them here and make them talk. I will make smokes to the north. The Shoshoni will answer. We will make them talk."

"It is not enough for them to tell what I already know. They must tell other men how they, three wolves, killed a miner called Lucky Tom. Then, if I am dead, my spirit will be easy."

Black Cloud meditated over the matter for several minutes, then quietly said:—

"They shall give the talk with a straight tongue. How are they called? How do they look?"

Hale repeated the three names until the Indian had them firmly fixed in his mind, plus the personal appearance of Mushet and Burnham. Then for good measure, Hale added a careful description of Curks, emphasising his gaunt figure and bony face until Black Cloud in great disgust grunted:—

"He is a dead man! Why is he not buried? Why do they not pull his lodge down over him and move their camp to a new place, where his ghost cannot make them feel afraid?"

Hale gave him Curk's name and told how he was chosen to settle disputes in Boise City. The Cloud repeated his name and asked several questions. He had been in Boise City, and, after Hale had answered his queries, he traced a diagram of the main street, indicated the location of the Tusk Saloon. Where the court-room should be designated he drew in the dirt the outline of a human head, wearing a hat; only the head was upside down, the sign for "death," while the hat explained it was a white man.

"If my brother dies the truth shall be known to all men, so my brother's spirit will rest. If my brother lives, all men shall know the truth, so my brother will not have to hide and run. It is good."

Satisfied he had done all that was possible to protect

his good name in event of death, Hale returned to the gulch and found the girl huddled in a heap under the cliff, her hair and hands covering her face. Hale said :—

“ Your granddaddy is all right. He’s in Idaho City. He’s been talking about diamonds and some of the folks up there reckon he’s crazy. Patterson is trying to find out from him where you’re hiding. He threatens to accuse him of passing counterfeit gold dust. Of course he can’t ever prove that, but he might make some of the men believe it for a spell. They don’t want him to quit town till the charge is proved or disproved. Patterson is a skunk and isn’t above planting some bogus dust in the cabin. His gang has visited it once that I know of, probably several times. Did your granddaddy have any hiding-place in the cabin ? ”

She lifted her head and answered :—

“ Yes, he had a little cache. Under the floor on the right-hand side of the fireplace. They’ll have to look sharp to find it. There’s a tin box and five or six bags of dust in it. He worked hard in the hills to get it together. If they’ve stolen——”

“ Of course they’ve stolen it, if they’ve found it. But that doesn’t matter. There’s enough here to make up for a thousand times what he had tucked away. But if they’ve stolen it and refilled the bags with the worthless article then they’d make out a case against him. I’m going to ride over to the cabin and make sure it’s all right.”

“ I’ll go with you ! ” she cried, jumping to her feet.

“ You must stay here——”

“ And wait, wait, wait ! I will not.”

“ I can’t make you stay here, Miss Harry. But you’re the best card your granddaddy holds. So long as they don’t find you they won’t be very hard on him. But if you play into their hands by going to the cabin——”

"What then?"

"They'd make up a charge that would put your granddaddy in jail for a spell. They've got a fool charge against me and they'll press it. That leaves you alone. You'd have to live alone in the cabin. Of course there's honest men who wouldn't see you abused ; but no one's going round and blattering that they intend to abuse you. There'll be no surface signs that any one is interested in you till Patterson gives orders to his gang ; then you'll disappear. If you'll wait here for a day or so, till I can come back, everything will be all right, I know. Then your granddaddy will be coming back and everything will be pretty slick."

Fear for her personal safety did not intimidate her. But she was anxious to do whatever would make her grandfather's lot easier. Of course they could never prove him to be dishonest. That was preposterous. Yet they might nag him, and he was old and easily irritated. With a sigh, she said :—

"I suppose you're right. You must be. It seems an awful muddle to me. No sense in it. Patterson is in jail. I'll wait here. Black Cloud ?"

"He will stay with you. He is my friend. He looks on you as the biggest kind of medicine. Tell him what to do and he'll do it. If you'll pack me a bit of meat and bread I'll saddle my mare."

Not only did he saddle the mare, but he also rolled the Mexican serape in his blanket and wore the big hat, and he took advantage of the girl's absence to procure a large bag of coarse gold from the brush shelter. Hale had not the slightest doubt concerning the stuff concealed under the cabin floor. It was worthless. Returning to the flat rock, he seized some bread and meat to eat while riding and shoved a package of food inside his blouse. Leaping into the saddle, he leaned down and took the girl's limp hand and said :—

"Buck up, Miss Harry. Nothing's happened to make you fret. Nothing can happen. Everything's coming out smiling."

"But you? Isn't there danger in the trip for you? I've been forgetting that you're in hiding."

"Danger in riding across country and entering your cabin at night?" And he laughed heartily. "Bless you, child, no! I was within a dozen feet of it when the sheriff visited it."

"But why, then, have you kept on hiding here?" she demanded.

"To be alone with you. Good-bye." Without pausing to note the effect of his words he waved his hand to Black Cloud and sent the mare through the passage-way.

He carried no rifle on this trip. He left the broken country behind him without sighting a human being. Late afternoon, when glare was giving place to shadow, and the plains were a sea of purple, and the depths between ridges and between turreted tops became profound abysses, and the dry heavens were filling up with a nebulous glory, the lone rider reached the river road. Among the inky shadows of some cottonwoods a pallid splotch caught his eye, and he advanced until he saw it was a placard. Pressing closer he leaned from the saddle and read:—

ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD FOR THE
CAPTURE OF CALVIN HARRIS, ALIAS CALVIN HALE,
ALIAS SHOSHOXI HALE. HE IS WANTED FOR MURDER
OF LUCKY TOM, A MINER. HE IS DANGEROUS AND WILL
RESIST ARREST. TAKE NO CHANCES.
BY ORDER OF THE SHERIFF
OF BOISE COUNTY

With an oath he tore the placard from the tree and threw it on the ground.

The sheriff's notice, however, revived his sense of caution and he turned from the road and took a course parallel to it. It was dark when he dismounted a quarter of a mile from the Prescott cabin. He left the mare in the sage-brush behind the cottonwood growth and groped his way through the timber and into the vegetable field. There was no sign of life about the cabin, but he remembered the posse's plan to use it as a trap and he took time to reconnoitre it thoroughly before venturing up to the door. The latch-string was out, and with a gentle push he sent the door open and stood to one side with a revolver in his right hand. After waiting for a few moments he stepped over the threshold and closed the door behind him.

He lost no time in fumbling along a shelf until he had located the candles. Striking a light, he soon had a candle giving off its dim illumination and then proceeded to curtain the windows with blankets taken from a couch. Having thus reduced the chances of detection from any one passing the cabin, he took up his search for the hiding-place under the floor.

At the right of the fireplace he found a puncheon board which had been sawed across two feet from the wall. With the girl's instructions in mind, he inserted his knife and lifted out the short section.

A rustling noise in the adjoining room reacted on him, and with a soft puff he reduced the room to darkness. He crept to the door and pushed it open. He could make out the position of the window in the end, and there was nothing between him and it. He entered and closed the door behind him and with his revolver ready passed along the wall, his left hand extended.

He touched a garment hanging from a peg and identified it as one of Miss Harry's gowns. He passed along rapidly and inventoried three other gowns or

petticoats belonging to the girl. Next he investigated the other side of the room.

He was now positive he was alone in the room and yet he must satisfy himself as to the cause of the noise. Returning to the living-room and closing the door behind him he relighted his candle and took the bold course. With his .36 cocked, and the candle held high, he kicked open the door. The room was empty.

With his problem solved he returned to the fireplace and inserted his hand through the aperture and at once encountered the tin box. Inside were six small bags well filled. All contained what appeared to be gold dust, but which he knew to be a counterfeit. The fireplace was deep with ashes, and he raked these to one side and emptied the bags. After spreading the dead ashes over the worthless stuff he produced his large bag of genuine gold and from it filled the six small bags. Then he carefully swept the floor and replaced the short piece of board.

"Now let 'em come," he muttered. "I've done all I can for you and your granddaddy, Miss Harry, and if I cash in I reckon Black Cloud will do some tall hustling to see I leave a clear name."

He extinguished the candle and listened tensely at the door before emerging. Satisfied none had come to spy, he glided forth to the mare and rode toward Placerville.

CHAPTER X

THE PLOTS

PATTERSON stood at the window in the sheriff's best room and stared down sullenly into the dark street. He had been drinking heavily, although there was no token of it in his pale face. But Bowen knew his man and understood that the cold veneer of his deportment might crack open any moment and permit the devil in the stormy soul to show.

The gambler wheeled about from the window and demanded :—

“ But why not to-night ? I can't stay cooped up in this damn hole.”

“ You was down there last night, most every night, Ferd. I tell you too much talk's being made.”

“ Bah ! Give me the real reason. Why shouldn't I go there as much as I like ? Ain't you the boss here ? Going to let a lot of old women storekeepers tell you what to do ? Ain't I going to win clear on the charge ? ”

“ I'm boss as long as another Payette Committee don't get busy and rear up on its hind-legs. Then hell will be to pay for all of us. You'll win out on the murder charge if you don't kick over the traces before we come to trial. Don't you have my best room to loaf in ? Ain't you well supplied with all you can ask for in drinks and smokes and grub ? ”

“ I want the real reason why I shouldn't go to the Gold Dust Saloon to-night ? ” repeated Patterson.

Bowen was not deceived by the polite timbre of his voice. His hand wandered to his hip as he replied :—

" You shall have it. You've been drinking too much. Hold on ! I don't say you're drunk. Wish you were. But you're in such a state of mind that while appearing to be sober it wouldn't take more'n a word to set you going. If you kill any one while waiting for trial they'll swing you off-hand."

Patterson walked to the easy-chair by the table and seated himself and with elaborate care lighted a cigar.

" Liquor does take me bad sometimes," he quietly agreed. " But ever since that damn Hale was in town. sneaking right under your eyes, there's nothing but whisky that helps me keep my nerve. If he can come once like that, he'll come again."

" I'm not even admitting he was here," sourly replied the sheriff. " If he was he took mighty good care to keep out of sight. A drunken fool says he saw him. No one else saw him. We picketed every road out of town. We kept tabs on Gorman. Hale never came near Gorman. Hale isn't a fool. Why should he come here and run the risk of being caught ? "

" I'm thinking he was keen to find somebody," muttered Patterson ; and for once he eyed the iron bars across the window with approval. " All right, Bowen. I'll be a good boy and stay at home to-night. But to-morrow night I must see Curks at the Gold Dust."

" You bet you'll see him. Just have a sleep and get out of that wolf spell and we'll have a high old time in the back room to-morrow. Curks can be pretty lively feller with a bottle when he takes the notion."

" But he never gets drunk. He never loses control of that tongue of his," growled Patterson. " I wonder just what his game is, anyway."

" Same's ours. He's playing on our side. Get something certain about these diamond diggings and make

a clean-up. Take Mushet, Burnham and Weber Joe, and we couldn't ask for a stouter crowd."

"They're stout," muttered Patterson, starting to pour out a drink and changing his mind. "Sometimes I'm wondering if they ain't too stout. They're Mormons. They'll favour Mormons before favouring us."

"Down in Utah, yes. But up here in Idaho they don't want to try any of that Church business."

Patterson fell to chuckling softly and Bowen's hand went back to the gun.

"Tell me the joke, Ferd," he begged.

"Oh, I was only thinking what a hell of a stir it would make if the town knew the truth about the death of Lucky Tom. A judge of one of our courts—"

"Ferd! Ferd! Are you plumb mad?" gasped the sheriff. "Good heavens, man, if one of my deputies should happen to hear you say them words and should git drunk and repeat 'em so's Curks, or his friends, heard about it— Well, I don't know how much small change your life would be worth."

"Meaning they'd walk right into this jail and cut my throat, eh?" snarled Patterson.

"Not that," mumbled the sheriff. "But they'd do a mighty slick job in proving how *you* killed Lucky Tom."

"What!" cried the gambler, springing to his feet and resting his hands on the table. "You stand there and calmly tell me that they can work a dirty job like that on me and make it stick?"

"You sit down, Ferd. If you make a move toward me I'll blow a hole through you bigger'n a pack-saddle. I didn't say they'd do you dirt unless you made that kind of talk and it got to them. They ain't the kind to keep their arms folded if a man goes to get 'em."

Patterson bowed his head and remained silent for a minute, thinking. His voice was perfectly calm, almost nonchalant, as he said:—

"All right. I missed a bet. It's better I'm here than at the saloon. No ; there'd be no sense in their playing a game on me unless they had cause. I'll never give them cause. But, Bowen, even when I haven't had a drink for days I sometimes wonder just how far they're to be trusted."

He said this very earnestly, and Bowen as sincerely answered :—

"We can trust 'em to the limit in anything limited to Idaho. They're after diamonds and agree to work with us. Also, they're after Shoshoni Hale. You'n me are perfectly willing they should get him, ain't we ? "

Patterson clicked his white teeth and nodded his head. Bowen resumed :—

"And maybe they didn't cuss in a soft, quiet way when they got back and heard that Hale had been here ! Such language. I really believe they'd rather get Hale than to bag the diamonds."

"I reckon it's safe to play that with a copper," agreed Patterson, his face lighting. "The old man refuses to talk ? "

"Been at him twice to-day. I reckoned he'd be scared blue when he was brought in. He was nervous, but all he seems to think about is diamonds. He's hiding something that makes him feel tickled and at the same time worries him."

"He showed that when he was up here. No new signs of worrying about his girl ? "

Bowen shook his head ; then added :—

"I may be mistaken, but I've got the idea he ain't overfond of Shoshoni Hale. Yet if he knows where Hale's hiding he won't make a peep."

"Have him up and we'll talk to him," said Patterson,

"But no rough work," warned Bowen, eyeing his prisoner dubiously.

"I won't move out of this chair. Fetch him along."

Bowen went to the door and gave an order to a deputy who was lounging in the corridor. In a short time Old Idaho was led in. Bowen motioned him to be seated. Idaho glared defiantly at Patterson and slumped down in an easy chair. Twice before this the gambler had endeavoured to wear down the old man's will power and force a confession as to where he had been hiding, and on each essay he had signally failed.

Patterson stared at the ceiling and carelessly asked :—

"Where had you come from when Fogus picked you up, Idaho?"

"Just been wandering round a trifle," promptly replied Idaho.

"Your girl is well, I hope?"

"My granddaughter is enjoying good health."

Bowen spoke up earnestly, saying :—

"Old Idaho, I'm your friend. I wasn't the cause of your being brought here. I've tried to do well by you. As your friend I tell you it's for your own good and for the girl's own good that you tell us where she is."

Old Idaho's bushy brows went up and his gaze was very innocent as he answered :—

"But I don't know, I tell you. I ain't seen her for some time. Think she must 'a' rode to Lewiston or Umatilla."

"Where's Shoshoni Hale?" shot in Patterson.

"Lawd! I ain't no more idee then nothing at all. He's probably back in the hills, jumping from place to place like a jackrabbit."

"Hale's no friend of yours, Idaho," solemnly informed Patterson.

The aged face grew angry and his voice was harsh as Idaho retorted :—

"I reckon I know that. He ain't no friend of yours, either."

"Then why don't you tell where he is? Why try to defend a man who's your enemy?"

Old Idaho held his tongue. The gambler displayed more venom when he warned:—

"You're in jail. You're going to stay in jail till you answer my questions or till you're hung."

Bowen noted the grim set of Idaho's jaw and signalled for Patterson to subside. Then he asked:—

"Where did Fokus pick you up?"

"Near the river. From what I heard I reckon he and Lyon was out hunting for di'mon's and found some." Now the old man's eyes sparkled brightly.

"Hunting for diamonds?" scoffed the sheriff. "A likely yarn. Where'd they be doing such a fool thing as that?"

The old man started to make a hot reply, then grinned cunningly and said:—

"Can't say. Never can tell where a fool errand will take a man. Mebbe they'd tell you. I'm too much worried about my granddaughter."

Patterson and the sheriff exchanged looks. With an effort the gambler controlled his devil's temper and said:—

"It'll be better for your girl if you tell us where Fokus was hunting."

"If we ever find any diamonds we'll give you a share," added Bowen.

Old Idaho smiled in his beard. He had not been greatly upset when made a prisoner. Now he was almost enjoying himself. Patterson was a prisoner on a murder charge, and yet he was most comfortably housed and had cigars and liquors on his table, quite like a gentleman. The two men had started with a desire to locate the girl, but were now—and this pleased

Old Idaho much—anxious to learn where Governor Lyon and Fogus had prospected for diamonds.

"We're waiting," ominously reminded the gambler.

"Oh, that's all right," snickered the old man. "Take your time. Nothing to hinder."

"You'll do mighty little waiting before swinging if we once give the word," grated Patterson, thrusting his white face toward Idaho.

"Swing for passing crooked dust," added the sheriff.

"You say your granddaughter is enjoying good health, and in the same breath you say you're worried about her and don't know where she is."

Old Idaho grinned tantalisingly, and the gambler cried:—

"You'll swing for the old counterfeiter that you are!"

"I'll probably swing for that the same time you swing for killing Sumner Pinkham," the old man replied.

Leaping to his feet, Patterson seized a bottle of whisky by the neck and swung it above his head. The sheriff grabbed his arm from behind and hoarsely begged:—

"My God, Ferd! Don't! Even I couldn't save you. Stop it and sit down! There's a better way, I tell you. We'll prove he passed the dust and then the mob will overpower the guards and hang him."

Patterson surrendered the bottle, dropped into a chair, and mumbled:—

"Take him away before I kill him. Come back and we'll talk."

Old Idaho was glad to be returned to his cell and placed under guard so no one might talk with him. On his former visits to the gambler's comfortable quarters he had shrewdly guessed the two men were trying to frighten him, but this last experience taught

him that Patterson was not one to be annoyed beyond a certain degree.

Bowen hurried back to his friend and found him pacing the floor and chewing an unlighted cigar. The gambler was deep in thought and gave no heed to the sheriff until the latter pulled his chair to the table, helped himself to a drink, and said :—

“ This is my idea how it should be worked. Take some citizens, search his cabin and find the bogus dust. That’ll clinch the case against him absolutely and give us a hold on him. The dust he passed on you won’t cut much figure so long as you’re under arrest for murder.”

“ Don’t be so cursedly unpleasant. That’s an ugly word,” growled Patterson.

“ It don’t make much difference what you call it so long as you get clear. If the dust is found in his cabin his dinner is cooked to a crisp. Then we’ll be in position to put the fear of death into him. I’ll pass word to the boys to come in a mob and hoot under his window. Then we’ll tell him to talk, or go to the mob.”

“ And if he is stubborn as hell ? What then ? ”

“ Then his girl will hear about it and come flying. Don’t forget for a second that she’s near here. Once she comes into the game she can disappear ; and if the old man refuses to be bluffed by our mob he’ll tell all he knows about the diamonds mighty quick when he learns we have the girl.”

“ That sounds right,” mused the gambler. “ The girl is the ace, all right. It gives us two ways to get him. Plant the cabin, eh ? Got some fake dust ready ? ”

The sheriff laughed heartily and explained :—

“ It’s funny how things work out. One of the boys, under my orders, went through the place last week and found where he’d hidden six bags of the stuff. I had told him not to disturb anything he found and he didn’t,

except to take a pinch from each bag and fetch it to me. It was all counterfeit. Of course it would never do for us to fetch it away, or let on that we knew anything about it. It must be found by some men like Riply or Gorman. With them as witnesses there can't be any loose talk about any one salting the cabin. Why, I've been scared lest the old fool would confess about the dust when we had him up here alone. I want him to deny it up hill and down, and deny it before some of the business men. Then we'll take him down there with some men like Ben Riply, have him deny it on the spot, then uncover the stuff."

"God! That's clever. You've got some brains all right!" softly approved the gambler. "If your man had brought it away some of these pious folks would be howling as how you'd cooked the evidence."

"That isn't all," proudly continued the sheriff. "I knew he had to have a place for making it. I sent the boys out to comb the country around the cabin and they found what must have been the old man's mill. Some one had made a fire and burned it. But once the dust is found under his cabin floor the mill will be swallowed as a fact."

Patterson nodded and pondered over the matter carefully. Finally he said:—

"Get Riply, Gorman, and others of their calibre together and in their presence ask the old man if he has any counterfeit dust hidden away. If he confesses it'll be before impartial witnesses. If he lies, take him down there and prove him a liar, and it's twenty to one that he breaks down and tells the truth—always before witnesses. It's absolutely necessary that some of those pure-hearted fellows go along."

"They can't refuse after making their bleat about 'law and order,'" chuckled the sheriff. "I'll have some of them, Riply for choice, select an assayer to go

with us. The stuff will be found in their presence. Then there can't be any flare-back."

"But don't be too quick to find it," warned Patterson. "Just happen upon it. Then rush the old man back here. Tell him the mob's coming to hang him, but that you'll sneak him away to Pioneer City and keep him under cover till the excitement is over if he'll tell where the girl's hiding, or where Lyon went hunting for diamonds. If he tells anything it'll be about the diamonds. Word will reach the girl somehow, and if I know that young wildcat she'll come a-flying."

"Wonder if she's hiding with Shoshoni Hale," mused the sheriff. "If Muggsy was right in saying he saw him in town the other night then it proves he's hiding within easy striking distance. I'll gamble that he and the girl and the old man have been together."

Patterson became a cursing madman. For five minutes he paced the floor, pouring forth terrible maledictions as he pictured the road builder successful where he had failed.

"Curse him!" he hoarsely shouted in concluding his tirade. "I ought to have cut his heart out! I'd rather he was dead than a dozen Pinkhams!"

"Ferd! Ferd! They'll hear you in the street. Simmer down, or our goose is in the fire. Curks was saying yesterday how folks are talking about your going to the Gold Dust so often."

"Damn Curks!"

"But he's cunning. He's shrewd. He's got the mind of a weasel. He's got lots of brains. And he's with us. He's Updyke's right-hand man. He's a Mormon and is close to Mushet and Burnham. He's our best bet that Mushet and Burnham will never play crooked with us. When he says we're overplaying our hand it's high time we pricked up our ears and harked."

Exhausted by his passion, Patterson dropped into

his chair, poured himself some whisky and faintly promised :—

“ I won’t break loose like that again. But the minute you said it I knew it must be true. Hale disappears. He bobs up—for I believe he was in town that night—and vanishes again. There’s no question about his hiding near here. All the better ! It’ll make Curks and his friends all the keener to play with us. We’ll get Hale when we get the girl, for if she rides in he’ll be sure to follow. I want Shoshoni Hale’s game closed ! I want it bad. We’ll cut down our visits to the Gold Dust, but I must go there to-morrow night. It won’t look so queer as to have the gang trooping up here. At the worst the town will think I’m there to play a card and find company. To-morrow you can pass the word to Riply and Gorman and have them arrange a committee to meet here the next day. Insist on those two going.”

“ They’ll go,” assured the sheriff. “ They can’t back water after making so much loose talk about the way I run my office and after sneaking down to Vantine’s store to hold secret meetings with business men when they think I ain’t noticing.”

Patterson’s pale face lengthened.

“ Do you know they’ve been holding secret meetings ?” he demanded.

“ Course I know it. The porter at the store gits drunk after hours in the Quartz Saloon. He told little Elsie how his boss took men downstairs into the underground store-room. There’s only one thing that would pack fifty men together down in that hole ; and Ben Riply’s sticking round here till they get their committee organised. He’s showing them the Payette way. And I’d feel lots happier if I could stumble on to a pint of diamonds and quit the Territory. Curks and his friends feel much the same way.”

"They'll never have much heart for diamonds until they've put Hale out of the way. Bagging him will be their first job. If he was here as Muggsy says, it looks bad for them unless they get him quick."

"They're thinking about him every day," said the sheriff with a grin.

Patterson's face was impassive, but in his heart he was worried. He had seen the suppression of the lawless element in various mining camps. His education permitted him to look beyond the morrow and to understand that crime could hold sway only for a limited time. He had believed that it would require at least another year for the honest men and women of Idaho to secure control of the Territory's affairs. Now he was fearing the transfer of power would be made much sooner. He was careful to mention nothing of this sort to the sheriff, however. Should Bowen perceive the change coming he would fear for himself and endeavour to safeguard number one at the expense of all his old cronies.

The gambler filled two glasses, pushed one toward the sheriff and brusquely announced:—

"Open the game to-morrow. Fix it to start for the cabin the day after if possible. Tell Mushet there's no doubt about Hale being in town while they were away."

"You're a shrewd one, Ferd," exclaimed the sheriff admiringly. "You look around and beyond a case the best of any man I ever saw."

After Bowen had gone about his duties Patterson abandoned his impassivity and smoked cigar after cigar without losing the worried expression from his face. In San Francisco it had seemed the easiest and most desirable of lives. Soft living and money for the taking while fools roughed it and lived hard. After he was compelled to flee from California he continued satisfied with his mode of life.

In Oregon all had gone well until he killed Staples. He could now see that Staples' death had been a bad play, yet he did not regret it. Pinkham's death had been deliberately planned from the time of the adventurer's arrival in Idaho. But to-night, with tobacco withholding its solace, he was questioning the wisdom of this last crime. He suspected that he had worked more for Bowen and his little ring than he had for Ferd Patterson. He would be cleared; the sheriff and his friends would see to that. The jury to hear the evidence would contain men for acquittal even if they had witnessed the crime.

But Patterson was wondering where he would go next. With Riply inculcating the Payette Committee's ideas of speedy justice, the Snake River basin would soon be too small to hold a marked man. When he left Texas to enter upon a career of gambling and ruthless slaying the geographical scope for his talents seemed to be illimitable. But Staples' death and other affairs now barred the coast to him except as he might sneak through as a wary transient.

Montana would have been his choice had not the hanging of Henry Plummer and his henchmen the year before spoiled that climate for the lawless.

"Texas and Mexico left!" he concluded in disgust. "To wind up about where I started. And I never could stand greasers with their knives ready for your back. It would have been better if I hadn't turned Pinkham off. Yet I'm glad he's dead. If I could get hold of that girl I'd break to Utah with her. Probably a fool to make a play for her. But somehow— Well, she's the only thing that ever suited me completely."

CHAPTER XI

VINDICATION

OLD IDAHO faced the morning's menace with a courage built up overnight. His defiance of Patterson both elated and amazed him. He had dared to speak derisively to one who was in high favour with the sheriff. And nothing had happened to him. True, the gambler had attempted to brain him with a bottle, but the very fact the attack was blocked by Bowen proved to the old man that he was a figure of much consequence.

Idaho realised he had a double secret to guard ; the town's citizens must not learn the location of Lucky Gulch, nor the fact that Lyon and Fogus had hunted diamonds at its mouth. From the last two men he must keep the secret of the gulch. This high resolve never to betray the Lost Diggings left him less concerned about the charges of counterfeiting.

Diamonds, rather than gold, were filling his thoughts as he ate his breakfast in the narrow cell and waited for his captors to make the next move. His avid greed for precious stones convinced him that Patterson and all the others were similarly obsessed.

This belief forced his granddaughter deeper into the background and permitted him to minimise his former fears for her safety. For who would have a thought for a chit of a girl when diamonds were the stake ? Diamonds ! Why, even the " teeny " ones were worth a thousand dollars apiece. By mental calculation he decided he could carry half a million dollars' worth in

one capacious pocket. The thought made his heart throb painfully. It followed that he was in a defiant, an almost disdainful mood, when he was conducted to the sheriff's office for further questioning.

But when he passed through the doorway and beheld the audience awaiting his coming, vague fears began disturbing his complacency. The presence of Ben Riply, slight and dapper and the mouthpiece for the famous Payette Committee, warned him his affairs might be taking a grim turn. Beside Riply was seated Jack Gorman, who barely nodded to the prisoner and who looked very sober. Along the wall were seated several merchants and professional men, and their abstraction was ominous. Hoskam, as assayer, reputable and well liked, was seated beside the sheriff.

Patterson had been astute enough to plan a gathering of the town's best element, so that no question would be raised as to the genuineness of any evidence discovered. Aside from the sheriff and one deputy there was none of the criminal class present.

After Old Idaho had seated himself the sheriff announced :—

" Gentlemen, we have a stubborn case here. This man is accused of making and passing counterfeit gold dust. I've asked you here to listen to anything he might have to say before we search his cabin down on the Payette. I am hoping he will confess and save the county expense. It will count in his favour later on. I hope he will tell us where he keeps his stock of spelter, providing he has not got rid of it all."

He paused and waited for Judge Curks to sidle through the door and to a chair. Then he continued, addressing the prisoner :—

" What have you to say ? "

The old man stared at the ceiling. He was not so well satisfied with his position as he had been while

confronting Patterson and the sheriff alone. Ben Riply leaned forward and in his shrill, incisive voice commanded :—

“ Your attention, prisoner. Answer the sheriff.”

Old Idaho shifted his position. The little man disturbed him. He could ignore the bluster of the sheriff, but there was much talk about the silent power represented by Riply.

“ I ain’t got any make-believe dust,” he said slowly.

“ That seems to settle this part of it, sheriff,” Riply briskly said. “ He has had his chance. He denies. Now follows the search to substantiate the charge, I suppose.”

“ That’s what we’re reckoning on, Mr. Riply. Of course there’s a chance he’s telling the truth after getting rid of all of it. He got rid of twenty ounces at Patterson’s table alone.”

“ Patterson is up for murder. I’m afraid a jury wouldn’t take much stock in his evidence. If we must go down to the cabin let’s be about it.”

But the merchants and professional men at once developed uneasiness. The trip was tedious and would take them away from their affairs. One spoke for all when he suggested :—

“ We understand this is merely a move to secure possible evidence. We men here are tied down to business matters and can’t afford the time necessary for such an investigation unless our presence is absolutely necessary. I have two wagon trains due any hour and I know the others are as pressingly engaged. I would urge that Ben Riply go as our representative. Mr. Riply knows we will not allow him to make any financial sacrifice, but just now he’s foot-free and we’re hitched up.”

Riply promptly replied :—

“ I was asked to come to Idaho City by certain

gentlemen to give advice on certain matters. This case seems to fit into our business. I'll be pleased to act for the citizens in general."

Old Idaho squirmed under the speaker's cold gaze.

"I'd like to go along if no one objects," spoke up Gorman.

"No one would suit me better," said Riply.

Judge Curks rose and, folding his bony hands, announced:—

"It is my desire, as judge of the Boise City court, to make this trip. Boise City believes it can learn much from its sister town. And we folks down in Boise hope to work hand and glove with you people in elevating the cause of law and order."

Riply gazed at him stonily. The sheriff expressed his pleasure in having the representative of Boise City justice in the party. He proceeded to explain the presence of the assayer. The assemblage expressed its approval of Hoskam's part in the investigation and then broke up. The sheriff directed the deputy to bring horses, and Gorman and Riply departed to procure their mounts. Old Idaho, now nervous and apprehensive, tried to stifle his fears by remembering that Governor Lyon and D. H. Fogus also had a secret to guard. What could Idaho City do to an old man if the governor of the Territory was on his side?

"And, by Judas! he'll be on my side when he learns what I've got to trade," muttered Idaho. "I can throw it either way. If they find the stuff I can buy myself off by telling Lyon I'll give him away if I ain't turned loose and given a share in the diggings. My diggings, if I could have my rights. And I can always trade with the sheriff—me to go loose and him to have a chance at the sparklers. I'm all right no matter how the cat jumps."

Yet the sharp, cold face of Riply worried him; but

what was one man against the influence of the law as represented by the governor and the sheriff? He would have felt more at ease, however, had he not been cross-examined by Patterson and the sheriff, concerning the girl and his own knowledge of the diamond diggings. The concentration of all efforts to prove him to be a counterfeiter was disquieting.

When the cavalcade finally formed it contained nearly a dozen men, the solid element of the town being represented by Riply, Gorman and Hoskam. Judge Curks rode up on his spotted pony. For the benefit of the spectators he informed the sheriff:—

“Boise City, sir, is not above learning how to enforce the law by studying the efforts of this beautiful town. Where Idaho City makes improvements Boise City is proud to imitate.”

This sentiment was greeted with a faint cheer from a group of ne'er-do-wells, and a sardonic grin from Gorman. Riply frowned and whispered:—

“That's one of the worst ones in the whole lot. He's so cunning it's almost impossible to catch him. He's one of Patterson's friends. Shoshoni Hale will swear to that.”

“Shoshoni Hale,” sighed Gorman. “Wish everything was all right for him. He's a mighty fine man.”

“I admire your loyalty, but your friend has much to explain before I can accept him as being all right,” curtly returned Riply. “If he didn't kill the miner why does he hide? They'll get him some time.”

“He's hiding from Mushet, Burnham and Weber Joe. They killed his father. They've been after him by spells for the last six years.”

“And it's said his real name is Harris. Why be ashamed of his name? The three are in town now. Why doesn't he have a reckoning if they killed his

father? Sounds fishy. He doesn't look like a man who'd dodge a fight."

"Hale or Harris, he's all right," stubbornly insisted Gorman. "As for the Danites, he's just learned who they are. We'll hear from him some day."

The sheriff now gave the word and the investigators trotted from town, riding in double column. The pace was easy with no attempt to make time, and the night was spent in the open some ten miles below Placerville. The journey was resumed at sunrise.

At the very start Old Idaho had vowed to himself that he would hold his tongue and answer no questions. When they induced him to talk they would catch a weasel asleep. He knew the traps they'd try to lay for him even before they spoke a word. This and much more he kept telling himself. But no one endeavoured to make him talk on the first day, nor on the second, while they were fleeing from the sun down the western road.

This indifference began to worry him. Of course they had some game, and of course they would try it before reaching his cabin; and yet Riply and Gorman, riding side by side, had nothing to say to him. The sheriff, riding companion of Judge Curks, heretofore so persistent in questioning him, now gave him no heed. Even the deputy who rode at his stirrup, ordinarily a garrulous fellow, had no interest in him.

Of the others there was none to give him more than a passing glance of curiosity. Among themselves they talked and laughed, but the prisoner was left entirely to his own reflections.

Intense contemplation of possible diamond mines could not compensate for this sort of treatment. Each mile of the journey found it more difficult for him to concentrate his thoughts on the chimerical riches. Various causes for worry demanded his attention.

There were the girl's fears over his disappearance. Heretofore his viewpoint had been too narrow and selfish for him to reflect on Harriet's alarm on discovering he had left the gulch.

He had stolen out in the night, believing with childish credulity that he might find a diamond on the surface of the broken rock ; and he had taken it for granted that diamonds glittered and shone in the dark. When morning came he was amazed to observe how far he had wandered from the fan-shaped talus. Doggedly insistent on making his imprudence count for something, he had pressed on to other rocky areas, and blinded by his great passion he had lost track of time and had neglected to take note of the various landmarks. Doubtless his hopes and anxieties had obscured his natural shrewdness.

Ever since his capture he had endeavoured to recall his movements in the early morning, but there were bits he could not remember. It was much like having his physical vision baffled by a black patch pasted over every object he would observe. He did recall planning to get a keg of powder from his cabin. His granddaughter even now might be in danger from searching for him. When belaboured with questions the instinct to defend himself left no room for these worries. If the men refused to talk to him he was resolved to bait them a bit.

" I ain't got any make-believe dust hid anywhere," he told the deputy at his side, but speaking loudly for the benefit of the sheriff and Curks, who rode just in front.

The deputy grinned vacuously and took a fresh chew of tobacco. Old Idaho waited for some one to speak. Disappointed, he leered cunningly at the deputy and confided :—

" But I got some things in my old head that's worth knowing. Worth millions."

Curks pressed against the sheriff's knee.

" You probably got a real gold mine hid away somewhere," jested the deputy.

" You've hit nearer the mark than your fool brains ever reckoned on doing, young man. I don't have to peddle spelter when I've got a real mine."

" Like hell you've got a mine!" And the deputy guffawed loudly.

" Well, Lucky Tom had one, they say," Idaho quietly reminded.

Curks stiffened and twisted his bony jaw toward the sheriff. The sheriff's hand, resting on the pommel of the saddle, trembled slightly. The deputy's jaw became stationary and he stared owlishly at the prisoner. All he could think to reply was :—

" You reckon you're a smart old hellion."

" You'd eat out of my hand for just what I can pan out in one hour, you fools!"

From the corner of his mouth Curks warned the sheriff :—

" Shut him up!"

The sheriff turned and delivered a malignant glance at the grinning deputy, sobering him at once. In doing this he noticed that greedy ears had overheard the old man's boasts, and that more than one pair of eyes were glaring wolfishly at the prisoner.

" Idaho, you talk too much for your own good. Best keep shut," he growled.

The old man was elated. He had drawn their fire. He had proved he was not to be ignored. The lively curiosity in the deputy's face and the ferocious interest revealed by several of the others convinced him he had started a train of thought which was leading at right angles from the matter under investigation. He felt that he was master of the situation ; and his head went up. With the possible exception of Riply and

Gorman at the head of the column, and Hoskam, the assayer, just behind them, there was none in the procession who was not wishing the business was over and the more momentous task of pumping the prisoner was under way.

Lucky Tom had baffled all endeavours to find his diggings. Just how the "vegetable man" could have stumbled on to the great secret was a tremendous problem. But if the "how of it" were erased, and if it were assumed that his alleged knowledge of the placer was fact, then there was furnished enough thought for wild speculations to keep the whole basin on tiptoe for the rest of the season.

There were some who scoffed at the diamond craze; there was none who made light of the lost diggings. It was fantastic to imagine the old man in possession of the great secret, and yet fortune played queer pranks in El Dorado; and there were historical instances of lucky discoveries which must have made the mountain gods laugh ironically.

And yet the old man's veiled boast was not so grotesque when one recalled the stories about his first coming to the basin of the Snake. Beginning with the first rush to the Clearwater region in 1860 there had been the stories of how Old Idaho had stumbled upon enormously rich diggings while passing through the country in 'forty-five.

These stories had passed beyond the legend stage and were accepted as being more substantial than the ordinary tradition. If he could have made the original discovery by accident why could he not relocate the placer after several years' residence in the country?

"He's got it!" whispered Curks under his breath, and the deep-set eyes glowed like coals. "Almost wish Mushet and Burnham were here."

"And he's blabbed it to all this crowd. This trip's

a bad move. You ought to have kept him a close prisoner. Now he's talked it'll be a bad move to take him back to town. Some one will get the truth out of him."

"Finding the spelter will send him back to jail; no way out of that. But I'll keep him close. Patterson is keenest over the girl."

"He's a fool! If he'd gone about it right he could buy a thousand women. He bungled it. Even if he knew where the diggings are he couldn't stay here to work them after he's acquitted. Pinkham's friends will get him yet."

"Hard work to believe the old cuss really knows."

"I tell you he's struck it rich."

"Then it's mighty queer he should be putting out spelter dust."

"He's struck it since the miner was killed. No one ever believed he was the miner's partner."

They dared whisper no more, for the men behind were crowding forward and those ahead were holding back, each eager to catch a pivotal word. The deputy worked his jaws rapidly, his stupid brain reeling under the immensity of new thoughts. He had been a contented hanger-on of the Bowen-Patterson gang; now brain cells were opening to allow a strange company to troop forth. He saw himself a man of unlimited wealth, of holding the purchase price of inexhaustible comforts—whisky, tobacco and animalism.

The sheriff dropped back and said to the deputy:—

"Judge Curks wants to talk to you."

The old lethargy returned. The dream of independence was but a flash high above the inaccessible heights. From the dizzy potentials of millions he slipped back into the comfortable groove of being a "kept man." If the gang struck it rich he would receive something, maybe a thousand dollars. He shivered

with delight in visualising what that would buy. Millions tore at his mind and left it raw and lacerated. But a thousand dollars was a soft and genial friend. He took the sheriff's place beside Curks, and by the time they reached the cabin his mind was asleep, his equanimity was restored. The hazy notion of kidnapping the old man and forcing him to reveal his secret was forgotten.

Riply and Gorman were the first to reach and enter the cabin. They had satisfied themselves there were no signs of recent occupancy by the time the sheriff jogged up with the prisoner. Judge Curks suggested :—

"It won't be convenient to have us all inside while the search is being made. We can all stay out here by the open door and windows except the sheriff, the deputy, Gorman, Riply and Hoskam."

He sat on the threshold of the door, his sunken eyes taking in every detail of the room. Old Idaho was deeply affected to be back in the familiar place and at once went to the adjoining room and stroked the simple gowns. For the moment he thought neither of gold nor diamonds and was only an old man sorrowing for the company of the girl he had so eccentrically deserted.

"But I didn't go for to do it, Harry," he whispered to a white gown. "Good Heavens ! You'd never think that of your old granddaddy, Harry ! What's done was done to leave you a rich lady."

"We want you, Idaho," Ben Riply crisply commanded. "We have no time to lose. Have you any counterfeit dust hidden in or about this cabin ? "

Old Idaho attempted to gain time by complaining :—

"That's for the sheriff to ask, not you."

"I speak for Idaho City. I speak for the county," snapped Riply.

"I advise you to answer any question Riply puts," said Gorman. "I speak as your friend."

"It's my place to put the questions," interrupted the sheriff. "But being an honest man, and as all here, so far as I know, are honest men, it don't matter who asks the questions. Idaho, save time by telling us about your spelter dust."

Old Idaho wet his lips. He was cornered, but he believed his hiding-place was very secure. He was cornered, and the instinct to fight to the last inch swelled up within him. "I ain't got nary a bit of make-believe dust, and never had," he cried.

"We'll begin the search without wasting more words," said the sheriff and motioning for the deputy to proceed.

"I'll take the other room," said Gorman, making for the door and forestalling the deputy.

Old Idaho found his gaze was continually switching back to the floor at the right of the fireplace. He feared he would betray himself, and to prevent such catastrophe he turned his chair and forced himself to keep his eyes focused on the doorway of his granddaughter's room. The sheriff was busy searching the cupboards. When he would have forced open a chest, Riply said:—

"Why waste more time? If there's anything hidden it's under the floor."

As he spoke he fastened his gaze on the old man, and Idaho involuntarily twisted his head and for a second stared to the right of the fireplace. He then remembered what he must guard against and quickly turned away. Riply smiled and walked to the fireplace and tapped the floor with his foot. Once more Old Idaho was compelled to switch his gaze about, and his aged eyes shone with fear.

"I thought so," said Riply. "He was looking at this spot when he came in. That's one reason why

I wanted to get inside ahead of him. Look under there."

Gorman ran from the girl's room. Men crowded close around Curks at the open door. Word was passed that the search was all but ended. Curks furtively watched Riply and felt a new respect for the little man's astuteness.

"A dangerous man," he told himself.

Some one produced a bowie-knife and handed it to the kneeling sheriff.

"Stop! Stop!" shrieked Old Idaho. "It ain't there! Nothing ain't there! You fellers quit prodding round my property! You quit, or you'll never know about the diamonds, or Lucky Gulch!"

Curks groaned. If only he and his kind could have handled the affair! What would they not learn from the old man! Idaho's hysterical voice dwindled down to a faint squeal as the knife slipped under the short length of board. Then came a crescendo of vituperation, directed largely at Riply and mixed with incoherent references to Governor Lyon and Fogus.

"Idaho, you keep still," commanded Gorman, placing a hand on his shoulder. "All this makes it bad for you."

The old man became silent, not because of the warning, but at sight of the board being removed. Hoskam rose from his seat in the corner and advanced to the table, ready to perform his part in the investigation. The sheriff thrust his hand through the opening and the prisoner moaned in despair.

"Pass up the evidence," said Riply, smiling coldly at the old man.

The sheriff began pulling forth the plump bags. Riply took them and arranged them on the table until there were six in line. The sheriff rose, brushed his knees and announced:—

"That's all. There's a tin box down there, too big to be taken out without removing the floor. It's empty now."

"The gist of the matter is what the bags contain and not the container," croaked Curks.

Hoskam advanced to the table and looked at the sheriff. The latter nodded for him to proceed. The assayer opened a bag and spilled some of the dust on to his hand. He glanced at it, then frowned and poured the entire contents out on the table. His examination was very brief. Turning to the deeply interested group, he said:—

"I won't bother to make any tests. They're not necessary."

"As bad as that!" exclaimed the sheriff.

"No. It's good as that. I'll stake my reputation that this is genuine gold dust. There are quite a few small nuggets scattered through it. I'll be glad to give sixteen dollars an ounce for it just as it is."

Old Idaho made a faint choking sound and slipped lower into his chair, his mouth agape and showing a black hole through the white beard. Only Riply had eyes for him. The others stared stupidly at the assayer. The sheriff leaned against the wall as one stunned by a heavy blow. Hoskam carefully swept the dust back into the bag and tied it securely. He opened another and poured the gold out on the table.

"The pure quill, gentlemen. Not cleaned as carefully as if might be, but I'll give sixteen an ounce for it just as it is."

"I don't understand! I thought——" began the sheriff in a dazed voice.

Curks quickly cut in:—

"Nor can any one understand. Why didn't he tell about it? A man could have been sent and saved all this trouble."

"We're not through yet," said Riply. "There are four more bags to be examined."

He was much puzzled. He went to the table and bent over the contents of the second bag. Hoskam coloured and demanded :—

"Are you doubting me, sir?"

"Never, Mr. Hoskam," was the prompt reply. "But if ever I saw a guilty man it's the prisoner. Look at him now!"

On hearing this speech Old Idaho sat more erect and began to fight to regain his self-control. The instinct of self-preservation was urging him to be careful. His natural cunning was considerable. His first effort was to conceal his amazement at Hoskam's verdict. All eyes swerved to the old man at Riply's words, then darted back to the table. Hoskam began examining the third bag.

"Good as the wheat," he ruled.

The remaining three bags were found to be equally desirable.

"I told you there wan't no worthless dust in this place," mumbled Old Idaho with a weak attempt to appear righteously indignant.

"We've lost a lot of time and taken a heap of trouble for nothing," declared a disgusted idler.

"It's never time lost to clear a man of a criminal charge," Gorman barked at him.

Riply smiled and minced toward the door, remarking over his shoulder :—

"You seem to be unfortunate in getting your evidence, sheriff."

"Ferd Patterson lost twenty ounces through him," hotly replied the sheriff.

"He's a low-down murderer!" scoffed Old Idaho.

Curks caught Bowen's eye and ponderously announced :—

"If the matter was within my jurisdiction I should release the accused on his own recognisance. Patterson isn't in position to appear against him—yet."

"What good does it do to keep him cooped up," said Gorman. "I've talked with those who were suspicious of him a bit back. They can only say—except that skunk Patterson—that some one dumped some counterfeit dust on them. They can't swear it was Old Idaho. Counterfeit dust has been worked off all over the Territory. Right now there's more than a score of counterfeiters within a short distance of Idaho City and Boise."

The others began to talk and Curks drew Bowen aside and whispered :—

"Turn him loose, you fool. He'll stay down here. Mushet and Burnham will jump him as soon as we can get word to them. Once they get him back in the hills they'll learn everything. We couldn't ask for a better chance."

The sheriff turned back to the vociferous group and warmly declared :—

"I'm mighty glad it's turned out this way. Judge Curks shows how foolish it would be to hold Idaho on the say-so of a man up for murder. He's free on the understanding he'll report at Idaho City if it turns out we need him again."

"Report in town? Why shouldn't I? I shall be up there a-plenty without being called," excitedly assured the old man. "Didn't I tell you I didn't have any make-believe dust? Acted guilty, did I? That rat of a fool can't tell the difference between being guilty and being scared. I was scared. Yes, sirree! I was mortal afraid some of you would pouch that dust, and I ain't putting it beyond men built like Ripley to do that same thing."

A shout of laughter greeted this remark! Riply smiled in an ugly fashion and suggested:—

"Better send that dust to town. If you keep it here you'll lose it. Then they'll be accusing me of taking it, seeing what a bad name you've given me."

This evoked another laugh. Old Idaho scratched his beard thoughtfully, and with a cunning leer said, "I don't go for to lose it. Will you take it to town for me, Mr. Riply. And give it to Mr. Crafts, of Crafts and Vantine. He'll put it in his safe for me."

Without a word Riply pocketed the three bags and passed the other three to Gorman. The men began withdrawing to their horses. Curks lingered behind, but found Gorman equally reluctant to depart. Gorman wanted to know if the old man could get along alone, and advised his going to Idaho City until he could be joined by his granddaughter.

"I'll stay here. When she comes back she'll look for me here," Idaho told him.

Gorman also wished to inquire about Shoshoni Hale, but did not dare while Curks was hovering in the background. Riply came to the open window and informed:—

"There's a boy fording the river above here. His nag seems badly blown."

Old Idaho gave a little cry—Gorman could not tell whether it was based on fear or joy—and ran from the room. The men in the road were watching a slim figure urging a weary horse up the river bank.

"It's Harry!" faintly cried the old man.

"His granddaughter," Gorman replied to Riply's inquiring look.

The sheriff whispered to Curks. Down the road trotted the girl. On beholding her grandfather she whipped the horse into a shambling gallop. Riding into the centre of the group she sprang down and flung

her arms about the old man's neck and glared defiance at the spectators.

"What are these men doing here with you, grand-daddy?" she fiercely demanded.

"It's all right, honey," quieted the old man. "Them derned fool yarns about me passing counterfeit dust are all buried so deep that they won't ever crop out again. They've come and found my dust is all right. Now I'm to be left in peace."

"You cowards!" gritted the girl. "You can't find any better business than to be pestering an old man! If you're through with your work I wish you'd go."

Riply's thin face turned pink, but he lost no time in mounting his horse. As the cavalcade started for home Gorman, the last in line, leaped down and ran back to the girl and eagerly asked:—

"Shoshoni Hale? My friend? Where is he?"

She fought back her tears and sadly explained: "I waited for him to return. But he didn't come. Then the Indian, Black Cloud, dreamed. Dreamed that Shoshoni Hale was in trouble. He said he must go at once. He left me. I don't know where he went. He said he was going to make a smoke."

CHAPTER XII

OVER THE RIM OF THE BASIN

IT was midnight when Hale hitched his mare to a rack back of the Heffron and Pitt store. He was wearing the long serape over his mountain dress and on his head was the cumbersome Mexican hat. Gorman's message that the three men were in town made his errand very definite. Now he had no fear of being recognised before locating the Danites unless it be by Gorman. He hoped Gorman was at his room, or playing dominoes at Kinney's place. From what Gorman had told him on his last visit he was led to believe Mushet and his companions would be found at the Gold Dust Saloon, but he purposed to take the resorts as they stood.

He walked to the rear of the saloon where he had first stopped when arriving in town from Boise City. He did not enter for he could see all the patrons through the window. There were bearded faces, but neither pendulous beard, nor long drooping moustache. Weber Joe would be with his friends. It was Joe who had given Judge Curks the Danite signal in the Boise City court-room. The majority of men, entering and leaving store or saloon, or walking the streets, had not used a razor for many months. But Hale was strangely contented; two were easily identified, and he had but to ask to have Weber Joe pointed out to him by any street lounger if the third man was present.

He walked up the back street and halted at every

rear window and as he had expected found no trace of his quarry. Yet his medicine was trying to tell him, he firmly believed, that this was his night, and he pursued his search confidently. On reaching the back of the Gold Dust Saloon he halted long enough to make sure his guns were loose under his cloak and then swiftly gained the front entrance.

As he stood in the shadows beyond the door he was a nondescript figure, the serape muffling his tall form and concealing the mountain dress. Several sons of Old Mexico drifted by as he waited. Once he thought he glimpsed Jack Gorman coming down the street, and he drew back against the wall. His was a lone fight, and Gorman was too fine a fellow to be drawn into trouble. He would have rested easier on this point had he known that Gorman was out of town, on his way to Old Idaho's cabin. Feeling that his serape, muffling him to the mouth, and the big hat shading his face, made him unrecognisable, he ventured to lounge into the light streaming from one of the front windows. For ten minutes he watched the interior of the long room. He searched the face of each patron and was about to turn away when a familiar voice sent his hand inside his serape to clutch a revolver.

He did not turn his head. The owner of the voice passed behind him and halted on the threshold of the saloon. It was Ferdinand Patterson. With him was a deputy sheriff, his badge worn conspicuously. In this amiable fashion was the gambler deprived of his freedom by the law.

Patterson's entrance was greeted by many boisterous voices. Yet there were some men who eyed him gravely. The gambler smiled and bowed. Then he seemed to sense the slight undercurrent of hostility and his pale face hardened. It was as if the silence of the minority had drowned the warm welcome of his admirers. He

spoke to his guard and the deputy led the way down the bar and into the gaming hall.

Hale slipped around the corner and ran to the rear of the building and gained a side window. The end of the hall was partitioned off and formed sleeping quarters for Patterson before Pinkham's murder transferred him to the jail. A score of men and as many painted women were in the hall, grouped about the various tables. When Hale took up his position they were gazing at the closed door of Patterson's room and the gambler was not in sight.

Hale's Indian training permitted him to remain with great patience, and at last he was rewarded by the entrance of a man, dressed like a miner and yet with boots too polished for a miner. Hale felt a thrill through his whole being as he noted the face lost in hair. That the newcomer was some one of importance in the estimation of the habitués of the place was evidenced by the behaviour of the women. These clustered around him and yet took no liberties. Ignoring the women, he turned and asked a question of a man at the roulette wheel. On receiving his answer he walked rapidly to Patterson's door and knocked. The door opened and he disappeared.

Hale knew he had looked on Weber Joe, and his two hands were half-raised and his fingers clenched as he unconsciously went through the pantomime of strangling his secret enemy. The sound of some one approaching from the back street sent him from the window. He walked toward the intruder, staggering and mumbling the few words of Spanish he knew. The man passed him in the darkness and cursed him for a drunken greaser and threatened him with violence for taking up all the room.

At the end of the building Hale met with a set-back. The window was high up and closely curtained. The

top of his head came even with the bottom sill, and by placing his ear against the sash he could catch a murmur of voices and the little metallic clink of glasses, but no more.

Growing desperate, as he realised the precious hours were slipping away while he was still hiding in the shadows, he hastened to the front of the saloon, and glanced through the window again, preliminary to entering and seeking Weber Joe. As he gazed he stiffened and thrust a hand under his serape. A man with a long thin beard of the colour of ruby silver was in the act of seating himself at a table close to the window. With him, his profile to the window, stood a man whose long moustache hung below the chin. The two had just entered apparently.

They seated themselves and rested their elbows on the table and leaned forward to talk earnestly. Hale patted his guns and pulled the big hat well forward and, holding the serape across the lower part of his face, moved to the entrance. Drunken voices were raised in song and profanity. As if summoned by a signal a dozen women entered from the gambling hall and scattered among the tables.

It was while all eyes were on the women that Hale entered and glided to a table in the corner. His appearance was that of a Mexican dandy, and as he pulled a bag of gold from his blouse and dropped it on the table several lynx-eyed women decided he was promising game and made for him.

One was a mixed blood, with eyes that flamed with drink. As she glided toward Hale she needs must pass close to the table Hale was watching. The man with the long spindle of a beard reached out a hand and caught her wrist and pulled her down beside him. With the snarl of a wild-cat she darted a hand to her stocking after a knife, but the man caught it and,

bringing both her hands together, placed them on the table and covered them with one of his.

He said something to her from the corner of his mouth and the feline glare faded from her dark eyes and she cowered at his side. The two men continued their talk, the prisoner sitting sullenly between them. Of the others only one succeeded in reaching Hale, her companions being captured by the intervening tables.

Hale waved to a waiter and two glasses of liquor were promptly served. The woman smiled, the layers of paint making her face a ghastly mask, and sought to find a welcome in Hale's eyes. His eyes were all that were visible, the wide hat-brim and the serape eliminating the rest of his features. There was something in his steady stare that unnerved her. With an uneasy laugh, she said :—

" You've had a hard time on the road, or up in the hills, Señor Dearie ? "

He nodded, and added :—

" It's worse luck to see a critter like that paw over a handsome girl and make her stop with him when she don't want to." And he nodded toward the mixed blood.

His companion's face twitched nervously, and in a hoarse whisper she warned, " For God's sake don't let them hear you ! You're no greaser."

" The greaser who wore this cloak is dead," was the grim reply.

Her eyes grew round and she edged back, yet did not offer to leave.

" Who are you, dearie ? " she whispered.

" For all you know I'm Jem Helm," replied Hale, with a silent little laugh.

" No," she hissed. " You're not Helm. Who are you ? "

"I'm the man who doesn't care if they hear me at the half-breed woman's table."

She shivered as if cold and muttered:—

"We don't talk like that in here, dearie."

"What's to hinder?" he asked, all the time watching the two men and the breed.

"You're new to our ways, dearie. You don't know the ropes. Let Annie look after you," she coaxed. "Those are bad men to stir up. Now be good, or I'll run away from you."

Hale produced a fat nugget from the bag before him and rolled it about idly. The woman watched his long fingers with wolfish eyes and playfully attempted to take the nugget, coaxing:—

"Let Annie keep it for you, dearie."

He imprisoned her clutching fingers and demanded:—

"Why do you call them bad? One looks like a goat to me."

"Hush! Hush!" she whispered, her eyes dilating in terror; and she made no further efforts to secure the nugget. "Keep your mouth shut, you fool! That's Tod Mushet, from Salt Lake City. The women don't like him. We don't like West Burnham, either. That's Burnham with him. They ain't fond of love-making like honest miners. They're just cruel."

"Mormons, eh? Didn't know Mormons was fire-eaters," muttered Hale.

"There's lots of nice Mormons," the woman conceded, renewing her efforts to secure the nugget. "But them two are different. See the handle of that knife in Mushet's boot? He'd pull it on a woman as quick as he would on a man."

"Then he's a damn coward!"

"No, no, dearie! He's just cruel. He likes to use the knife. He likes to see folks suffer. They tell awful stories 'bout him and Burnham and Weber Joe. Joe's

in the back room now. Some say he's the worst of the three. God pity us if he's worse'n them two."

"Oughter run 'em out of town," growled Hale. "On t'other side of the Bitter Root range they wouldn't last long."

"Hush, dearie. Annie's your friend. She knows what she's talking about. You're from the Beaver Head country. You don't know what she knows," She was begging him, her voice trembling. "If they knew you was talking that way about them they'd have your throat open quicker'n it takes 'Monte Bill' to rig a hand for a tenderfoot."

Hale made a pretence of drinking. The woman sipped her glass and palmed the nugget. Hale did not appear to notice her sleight of hand, but the mixed blood did, and, infuriated because of the easy prey she was losing, she suddenly attempted to escape from the table. Instantly Mushet caught her by her braid of black hair and yanked her back into her chair. She groaned and dropped her head on her arms.

Hale rose to his feet and pushed the bag of dust toward his companion and in a low voice said:—

"Keep it. And git out of here. I'm going to see if your bloodthirsty friends have any fighting talk to make to a man from the Beaver Head country."

She tried to detain him, but he shook her off. Wide-eyed with fright, she clutched the bag to her bosom and scurried to the bar to tell the bartender that a crazy miner from over the mountains was bent on picking a quarrel with Tod Mushet. Before she had imparted this information Hale had glided over to the Mormon's table and leered down at the mixed blood and said:—

"Little *señorita* want to git away? "

The woman lifted her head and stared at him blankly.

Burnham gave him no heed. Mushet glanced up, his eyes glowing with a yellowish light.

"Vamoose, you darn greaser! Vamoose while you can."

Hale walked half around the table as if retreating, but when behind the girl he seized her chair and with one effort he lifted it half a dozen feet from the table, and tilted her out on the floor. She lit on her feet like a cat, and at the same moment Hale dropped into the chair, his back toward the bar lights, one hand resting loosely in his lap, the other holding the serape across his chin.

Mushet and Burnham viewed him in bewilderment. Before their rage could break loose the hand holding the serape was shoved upward until the ear was locked between the thumb and first finger—the Danite sign of recognition. Mechanically the two men did likewise. By this time the woman Annie had told her news to the group at the bar, and as the word was whispered over the room the ribaldry ceased and all eyes were turned expectantly on the table. But the spectators were disappointed. The miner from the Beaver Head country did not seem to be unwelcome at the table, for the three men were sitting quiet enough.

"Who are you to make that sign?" whispered Mushet, trying to peer beneath the broad hat-brim and beholding only a pair of eyes.

"Oh, I know that sign," chuckled Hale.

"You're no greaser," hissed Burnham.

"The one who wore this rig is dead," softly laughed Hale. "The sign? I've seen it given in the Saints' country. Down in Springfield in the old days. More killings there by the Sword of Gideon than in any other part of Utah, considering the population. I remember in 'fifty-nine that there was a man named Harris who was killed on what's now the Idaho border."

The two exchanged startled glances, then concentrated their attention on the intruder. Burnham softly said :—

“ You’re either a very brave man, or a crazy one, to come to us like this.”

“ And give that sign,” amended Mushet in a low whisper.

“ Along of mentioning the name of the man Harris,” hissed Hale, dropping the corner of his serape and allowing the bosom of his fringed shirt to show.

For a few moments the two were silent and rigid, their eyes focused on the hands now pushing the serape back to rest near the hips. Then Burnham said :—

“ Yes, we remember Harris. He was blood-atoned. But what made you come here? Not that you could escape your father’s fate by changing your name and living in the mountains; but why seek it? ”

“ I was here a few nights ago, but you were in Boise City. I’m tired of running away,” was the calm answer. “ You fellows have been hounding me a bit close lately, so I thought I’d take time off and meet you. I never could find out who you were till lately.”

Both Burnham and Mushet sat with their hands gripping the edge of the table. Both cast side glances toward the closed door of the gambling hall. Hale noticed this and laughed noiselessly, warning :—

“ If he comes in it’s your death sentence. I know he’s in the back room with Patterson.”

“ You know him? ” asked Burnham.

“ Weber Joe? Bless you, yes.”

Mushet slowly lifted a hand and smoothed his long beard, but taking care to end the caressing gesture above the table. He curiously inquired :—

“ Where did you learn that sign? ”

“ My father showed me when we were trying to

escape. He told me always to beware of a man who made that sign," gritted Hale.

"But you could have kept in hiding or gone to some other part of the country—gone East," continued Mushet.

"I've told you. I'm tired of running away. Tired of being dogged. Tired of being afraid that every stranger I meet will murder me when I sleep, or when I'm not looking. I could have shot you through the window. I should have done so if I wasn't anxious to know why you killed my father."

"He was an apostate," grumbled Burnham, showing his first bit of emotion.

"He was worse than that," added Mushet harshly. "You are brave to come in here like this. You shall have the whole truth before you die. He was appointed to serve as a Son of Dan. He was initiated and taught the token. Then he weakened and fled. As an apostate he might have been reinstated after showing repentance. But as a betrayer of our purging band he was sentenced to pass over the rim of the basin. His sin could only be washed out in his blood. By killing him we saved his soul."

"The sentence was 'root and branch,'" gently mused Hale.

Both men nodded slowly.

"I am glad to know about my father," Hale continued, and still speaking softly. "He was good to me. I never could imagine him having anything to do with cowardly murderers. Before he died he told me he was sorry he ever joined. Of course he was sincere when he joined it, and never dreamed of the evil it covered. You know I went back to him while you were chasing me in the bush?"

Neither of the men attempted to conceal their surprise. Hale smiled and said:—

" You know it now."

" This is not a good place to talk it over," murmured Burnham, his eyes still focused on Hale's hands. " Suppose we go somewhere, where we can be alone, and arrive at some understanding? I am sure the church will be satisfied with one blood-atoned. Conditions have changed during the last few years."

" You think the sentence could be changed; that I may not be bothered any more?" asked Hale.

Burnham bowed his head, and Mushet added:—

" I'm sure of it. Suppose we go upstairs——"

" Squat!" hissed Hale, his fingers coiling around the handle of his right-hand gun.

Mushet slumped back in his chair, his yellow eyes flashing a query at Burnham. The latter now took a different course and reminded Hale:—

" There's a price on your head for killing Lucky Tom. There's also the matter of Sydney Bill. I'm honest enough to say I don't think they can make the last charge stick. But there's no doubt about the first."

" How many of you were there when Tom was killed?" Hale asked.

" Three," readily replied Burnham. " We saw you for a second as you stood by the road. We left our horses and followed you, as we supposed. When we reached the fire we saw your mare. It rather puzzled us to find you wrapped in blankets and crouching like a sick man before the fire. You'd had plenty of time to get back and into the blankets, but you had seemed wide-awake and in good health when you showed up at the road."

" I didn't go back to the camp. I went to the crick to git Tom's horse," explained Hale.

" I see," mused Burnham. " It has sort of kept us guessing. We knew it must be something like that,

or else that you knew we were coming and ran for it."

" You cursed dogs ! " muttered Hale, the veins on his neck swelling. " At least you now know I didn't run. You begin to suspect now I'm not afraid to meet you."

" Let's not get personal," urged Mushet. " Fact is, the killing of Lucky Tom is fastened on to you."

Hale scowled and was silent for a bit. Then he said :—

" As I make it out you men are the only ones who can clear me of the charge. If I kill you then it always will be held against me. I'll always be hunted for it."

" Exactly," murmured Mushet, again stroking his beard.

" But how did you make it appear I was with Lucky Tom at all ? "

" Jem Helm robbed you. You arrived here with plenty of dust. When they dug Lucky Tom's body up there was no dust on it. Then again we said we saw you camping with the miner. Of course it was generally known how you got him to ride away from Boise City and then followed at his heels."

" The case is strong," sighed Hale. " If I kill you then I won't have any chance to prove you did it."

" Naturally not," said Burnham, his long moustache wriggling like two vipers as he smiled into the puzzled face.

" So I say let's get out of this crowd and talk it over," urged Mushet. " I reckon we can fix it to show we was mistook about your being with the miner. We are good friends with the sheriff."

" Wait a moment," warned Hale. " There's another way out of it."

The two nerved themselves for the crisis which they

knew would terminate the strange interview. From the instant they recognised Hale they knew it must be to the death, and they had killed time in hope that the third man would put in an appearance.

"There's three of you, not counting Curks, who may have been told things by some of you," slowly continued Hale.

Mushet's long beard jerked sharply. Burnham wet his lips. The mention of Curks had affected them. Hale grimaced and jeered:—

"So Curks may know something about it, eh? But to make it safe say I have one of the three who were there. He can confess and that'll lift the charge against me."

"Forcing a confession from a son of the Church, from Weber Joe of all others, would be mighty hard, we reckon," said Mushet, his words coming as if jolted from him.

"It would be hard ordinarily," conceded Hale, his tone as inconsequential as if he were discussing the price of flour. "But I have a friend, one of the northern Shoshoni. He has a way, I believe, of making a man talk."

"That would mean you would have to catch your man first," muttered Burnham.

"Now I know him by sight that wouldn't be hard. If he quits town my Indian friend would pick him up inside of twenty-four hours."

Mushet and Burnham had hoped some one in the room would recognise the young man, who sat with his hat pushed back, his chair clear of the table so as to give him plenty of room for drawing a weapon. But the serape and the big Mexican hat entirely changed Hale's appearance. Jack Gorman would have known him could he look through the window and secure a glance at the lean face; but Hale's back was toward

most of the drink-flushed men, and the serape covered his mountain dress.

Mushet snapped his eyes and Burnham's fingers ceased their idle tapping on the table and grew rigid. Hale smiled at the little byplay and informed: "No need of taking foolish chances; so don't close your eyes again, Mushet. I came here to kill you two. I could have shot you through the window, or as you were leaving the place. But I am not a Son of Dan. Now listen and be careful to do as I say, or I shall have to shoot you in cold blood. You will rise and stand with your backs to me. Then I will turn my back on you. When I say 'Go!' the three of us will dive for our guns, wheel and fire."

Burnham's pupils dilated; but Mushet sneered, "When you say 'go' you will have drawn and be ready to shoot us as we turn."

"You dirty dog!" whispered Hale, and he thrust his thin face forward. "You low, brutal, cruel dog. You don't deserve the shadow of a chance."

"Hold on! We accept!" yelped Burnham. Then to Mushet:—

"He's got the say. If he wants to shoot us he can do it before we make a move, Tod. If I get out of this I'll never sit down close to a table again. He's well back and got plenty of room. We'd be over the rim of the basin before we could start for our guns. Harris, or Hale, go ahead and give the word."

Hale directed:—

"Keep your hands well up and shove your chairs back. When I stand up, you stand up and fold your arms. Then turn with your backs to me and drop your hands to your sides. But don't make a move till I say 'go,' for until you hear the word you'll not know whether I've got my back to you, or am watching you."

The men worked their chairs back from the table. From the other tables came shouts of drunken laughter and the shrill exclamations of the women. The women to whom Hale had given the dust was making friends with a miner across the room, but as he smirked and whispered her gaze was continually wandering to the three men. She beheld them rise as if to separate and she breathed in deep relief.

The Danites stood with their arms loosely folded. Hale had his thumbs hooked into his heavy belt. The two slowly turned and faced the windows. Their foreheads were wet with sweat, and Burnham drew a deep breath to smother the heavy pounding of his heart. He expelled his breath with a slight hissing sound as he found a window afforded him something of a mirror in which he could detect Hale's first move to change his position. Their hands fell at their sides.

Hale observed the reflection in the window and frowned. He did not direct them to change their position, however. There were no tables between them and the wall, and if they shot straight there would be no damage done to outsiders. With his hands on his hips he suddenly spun about, and when back to them cried :—

“ Go ! ”

And the same impetus that carried him half-around allowed him to complete the circle. But the two had been alert and wheeled when he began to turn.

The .36 in Hale's right hand boomed twice, and between the shots came the crack of Burnham's lighter weapon. Mushet went down with his gun drawn and cocked. Burnham fell across the table, feebly trying to recock his weapon. Hale discovered his left arm was numb and useless. He shoved his right-hand gun into the holster and took the gun from his left hand and leaped toward the door. Burnham rolled off the table

and fell with a crash, dead beside his partner. It was then that men recovered from their stupor and sprang from tables or dived under them, and that women screamed and the bartenders dropped behind the log barricade forming the front of the bar.

As Hale backed to the door Patterson and his guard burst into the room. Directly behind them came Weber Joe. Patterson, quick of eye and as quick of wit, recognised Hale, who stood framed in the doorway, and with a yell snatched a gun from the deputy and fired. Hale fired back and missed, and before he could shoot again Patterson had pulled the deputy in front of him. Weber Joe hurled the gambler and his man aside and began walking down the long room, his thick beard bristling. Hale hesitated and half-lowered his gun as he remembered the need of leaving one of the Danites alive to exonerate him. Weber Joe misinterpreted the reticence and laughed hoarsely, and made his advance more slow and deliberate.

"It's Shoshoni Hale!" yelled Patterson. "Git him, Joe!"

But the gambler himself made no further attempt to mix in the affair.

"I'll git him. I want him!" loudly announced Weber Joe.

The room quieted down. Over the edge of each table peered fascinated, frightened eyes.

"Losing your nerve?" taunted Weber Joe, barely moving his feet, so keen was his desire to play with his victim.

"Mushet and Burnham are dead behind the table at the front window," informed Hale. "Have I lost my nerve?"

"He killed them! He killed them!" screamed a woman's voice.

With a howl of rage Weber Joe threw up his gun and

at the same moment Hale began firing, his first bullet breaking the fellow's shoulder, the remaining four catching the heavy body, until the man went down shot through and through. With the last shot Hale leaped through the door and slammed it shut and raced around the corner of the building and into the back street. He reached his pony and made for the Centerville road. Now the cries of the mob and the shrieks of the women were drawing every one indoors out into the streets. The very pandemonium served as a cover for Hale to escape.

"What is it? What has happened?" shouted those citizens who knew nothing of the truth.

"Shoshoni Hale's come back and murdered half a dozen men!" bellowed a frequenter of the Gold Dust bar.

Once in the Centerville road Hale rapidly left the clamour behind him. It was dangerously near dawn when he rode through the town. Two miles beyond the town he found a secluded spot and went breakfastless to bed. He awoke near twilight and saw a dozen heavily armed men down in the road. They were riding toward Centerville and had come from Placerville. He was much puzzled at not beholding Sheriff Bowen among them.

Satisfied that the search to the westward had spent itself, he rode to Placerville and, skirting the town, struck into the river road. Overhead the stars, each a blaze of light, went about their eternal errands. Beside the road some insect life chirruped shrilly. He wondered what kind of a fairy-story Miss Harry would weave out of these bits of heaven and earth.

Now that he felt assured of making the sanctuary of the gulch he took time to review the tragedy. He could not make it seem real that the unseen evil was ended, that never again need he take to flight to escape

from the shadows. At first he regretted the death of Weber Joe and wished he could have spared him until the fellow had confessed the truth about Lucky Tom's death. But as he passed on to Curks' intimacy with the Danites and decided the Boise City judge must know the truth about the miner's death, he was glad Weber Joe had gone along with his evil mates.

He knew he must rest long and soundly before he could think adequately. The strain of meeting Mushet and Burnham and guarding against their every move had told on him. He felt weak and exhausted although he had slept the greater part of the day. It was as if some deadly poison had seeped into his system. But he had sought out and faced his father's murderers, and he exulted. It had been a double vengeance. It paid, so far as blood can pay, the score set up by his father's death, and in a measure it made up for Lucky Tom's death.

But, despite his victory, he knew Shoshoni Hale was a marked man until he could establish his innocence in regard to the miner's demise. If, by accident, any one should stumble upon Lost Gulch, then the whole Boise basin would be convinced he had murdered the original owner after learning the secret of his diggings.

As he rode through the early morning light to pass through the grape-vines he was startled by the abrupt appearance of Black Cloud, mounted. As they met Hale gave a realistic description of his experience in Idaho City. As the Indian listened his nostrils pinched in, his small black eyes glittered ; and he grunted loudly as he grasped the dramatic values of the strange encounter.

As Hale finished and would have asked whither he was going, the Indian hoarsely declared :—

" My white brother is turned red. He is a great warrior. He shall be adopted among my people. He

shall have a song made up about him. He shall have a head-dress that reaches to his heels, and each feather shall count as a coup, even as the Sioux warrior counts his kills."

"Where do you go, and why do you leave the girl-boy alone?" asked Hale.

"The girl-boy is back in the lodge of the old man. He is there. They let him go free from the strong lodge in Idaho City."

CHAPTER XIII

SHOSHONI COMES AND GOES

WITH the supper out of the way and the dishes washed, Miss Harry went to her room and put on her home-made white dress. For a mirror she had the window, and where the small panes broke joints, she had need to call on her imagination. She almost felt more at home in boy's clothes than in a gown ; nor did she consider it of any importance which she preferred. But would Hale like it ? The answer was of terrific importance. No longer worried by her grandfather's predicament, she began regretting she could not remain in Lost Gulch until Hale returned. Fears for his safety had filled her mind to the exclusion of all else. Now there was a little room for the new dress and much room for Hale.

Her heart told her Hale would come to the cabin. It would be monstrous if he dropped out of her life and left the scheme of things incomplete. The vague desire that she knew him better, understood him better, at times almost rose to the point of resentment. There was the grotesque notion, sometimes lurking in the background of her thoughts, that his life among the Indians had left him neither a white man nor a red man. The eccentric reflection, squares of white dress criss-crossed with window-sash, demanded her attention. Her lively sense of humour caused her to smile. Then came the suggestion she was seeing herself peering through prison bars, and she hurriedly turned away and entered the living-room.

Hale was there, standing just inside the door, rifle in hand and the heavy guns sagging in their holsters. After the first glance she wondered why she had thought him inscrutable and grim. His appearance now almost suggested diffidence. He was the first to speak, however, and he greeted :—

“ Howdy, Miss Harry. Howdy, Idaho. Good land, Miss Harry ! I’d hardly known you.”

Old Idaho did not rise from his chair before the fireplace. He grunted something, which may have been an expression of welcome. The girl quickly crossed the room, her eyes shining, her hands outstretched. It was the first time he had seen her dressed as a woman and he was a bit hesitant in taking her brown hand ; he held it gingerly, and stared at her in perplexity :—

“ Then you don’t like it, Shoshoni,” she crisply remarked ; and she withdrew her hand, gesturing for him to be seated.

He sank into a chair and allowed his gaze to wander from the toes of her civilised foot-gear to the mass of curls gathered in a whorl at the top of the small head. Then he slowly said :—

“ I like it a heap. But it makes you different. Seems like I must git acquainted with a new girl. And where’s that youngster I used to know ? Somehow you look older, bigger.”

“ Perhaps I’m growing,” she laughingly suggested. “ Or it may be the heels on the shoes. I don’t like them. I like moccasins. But ain’t you taking a big risk in coming here ? And where’s Pinaquana ? ”

“ No risk in partic’lar. Little lady’s back a bit by the river. She won’t come till I whistle. Then she’ll come a-tearing.”

“ You have her well trained——” the girl was

remarking when Old Idaho twisted in his chair and grumbled :—

“ You oughter know better’n to come here, Shoshoni. I’ve just had the devil of a time satisfying them fools at Idaho City that I’m an honest man. With all the thieves and counterfeiters laying ’round loose to be attended to it’s queer they have to spend time on *me*. But now they’ve been after me once, they may come snooping ’round ag’in. Might look bad if you was seen dropping in here.”

“ Meaning it would look bad, perhaps, for Shoshoni Hale,” quickly supplemented the girl. “ Of course there never was any question about Shoshoni’s honesty.”

She did not realise she might be making a comparison ; the old man winced. Hale was embarrassed. He had counted on a welcome from the girl, but Idaho had disappointed him.

“ I knew everything was all right with you, Idaho,” said Hale. “ Last night I watched the cabin until the lights told me you and Miss Harry were here alone. Perhaps I wouldn’t have bothered you to-night if it wasn’t a matter of business.”

The girl frowned slightly on hearing this. The visitor hesitated, then pulled a bag from his blouse and tossed it on the table, saying :—

“ I can’t bring myself to work much ; the gulch seems so lonely. But there’s your half of what I’ve panned out.

With a muttered exclamation Old Idaho bumped his chair to the table and gripped the bag in both hands, and hoarsely cried :—

“ So you’ve been in the gulch ag’in ? ”

“ Of course. I’m hiding there.”

Old Idaho fondled the bag in a trembling hand and endeavoured to guess the weight. Then he rose and secreted it in the big chest, but did not return to the

chair. Straightening his bowed form he fixed a suspicious gaze on Hale and said :—

“ It’s neighbourly of you to bother to work my diggings, even if you’re well paid. If it wan’t for Harry I’d go back there and do it all myself.”

With an uneasy laugh the girl reminded, “ Don’t be forgetting, granddaddy, that it’s Shoshoni’s gulch. What he fetches you is just a present.”

“ You quit that sort of talk,” loudly commanded Idaho, his beard bristling and the lean under jaw creeping aggressively forward. “ I ain’t forgitting nothing, as there ain’t nothing to forgit. I found that gulch in ‘forty-five. I’ve lost the use of it all these years. Already one man before Shoshoni has had the run of it and would be doing the same now if he hadn’t been rubbed out.” He stressed the last by staring fixedly at Hale.

“ I’m staying there only long enough to get in touch with Black Cloud. He’s up north and will return soon.”

The girl had missed the innuendo in her grandfather’s reference to the murder of Lucky Tom. She told the two, “ When Black Cloud left the gulch he said he was going to make smokes. I don’t know just what he meant.”

“ Going to have a talk with his friends by smoke signals,” explained Hale. Then to Old Idaho, “ You’d better keep clear of the gulch for a while. Men in town will be dogging you to see where you get your dust. If it’ll make you feel any better I won’t pan out any more.”

“ My goodness ! One would think you was a beggar to hear you talk, and that the gulch was our property ! ” cried the girl.

“ Harry, you keep shet,” harshly commanded the old man. “ It’s this way, Hale ; so long as you’re going

to be there for a bit you might's well do a little work. As to sharing up, why, there's many who'd reckon eighteen dollars a day mighty fine pay. Miners are satisfied to work for that, even less, in flush diggin's. But when it comes to splitting half'n half—why, great guns ! What if you should uncover a thick vein, say, a foot thick, of almost pure gold ? Perhaps not more'n ten minutes' work. Would you expect to take half of that ? ”

“ I'd expect it all to go to Miss Harry,” countered Hale before the girl could speak.

“ I'm the one to do the giving,” muttered Old Idaho, his old eyes filling with a new suspicion.

The girl's face was scarlet as she protested, “ Grand-daddy, what's come over you ? It's Hale's gulch. It's his gold. It's——”

“ Now you keep still ! ” angrily cried the old man. “ See here, Hale ; I don't understand your hustle in clearing out unless . . . Merciful heavens ! You ain't already uncovered that vein, have you ? You ain't gone and fired that blast I was fixing when you come mixing in and took the powder away ? Oh, my soul ! If that blast has been set off——”

“ It hasn't ! ” sternly interrupted Hale. “ Idaho, sink this in your mind ; the man who fires that blast will never live to tell about it. It will pull the cliff down on top of him. I'll not talk about gold dust any more to-night. Miss Harry, I reckon I'll go outside for a spell. If by any chance you'd like to step out——”

The girl did not hesitate to accept his diffident invitation. As she started for the door Hale advised, “ Better throw something over that amazingly pretty white dress. It shows up a bit in the dark.”

Old Idaho's mood persisted. He said, “ I don't like the notion of my girl having to hide when she talks

with a man. If he's in danger he oughter clear out and not be hunting a young woman's company."

" You shame me, grandfather," whispered the girl.

" Your medicine is strong, Idaho," admitted Hale. " It's a good talk. I shouldn't have called. But there wasn't any risk to-night—I've scouted up and down to make sure no one's hanging around to spy—and there was the dust I wanted to fetch to you."

" I spoke in a wide way," slowly corrected Idaho. " So long as you're not followed it's all right. And Lord knows I'm glad of, and in need of, the dust. But a young man can't be too careful of the girl he's sitting up."

" No man's 'sitting' me up, grandfather," sharply interposed the girl, her face going scarlet again. " Can't a man, who's proved himself a good friend, drop in and talk with us without such foolishness being thought, or said? Hasn't Jack Gorman called and talked with me, with us?"

Hale winced under an arrow of jealousy. The old man testily answered, " Gorman's talked with you, but he didn't have to make a special trip at night to do it."

" I don't want to do anything that'll make it disagreeable for you, Miss Harry," earnestly assured Hale. " Not being used to women folks I mayn't be so quick as some in knowing just what's perlite'n proper."

" Standing in front of the light's more dangerous than standing in the dark," curtly reminded the girl. " And I'll remind you mighty sudden when you ain't polite and proper. Come along."

The touch of savagery in her voice might have told the sophisticated that, combined with warm championship, her mood was not far removed from the sentimental. Hale only read in it an evidence of her displeasure.

As she snatched a long dark cloak from a peg and passed outside he followed and began, "I want you to know, Miss Harry, that I wouldn't for the world——"

"Shoshoni Hale, you'll make me as ugly as an ugly cat. If any one comes you'll have to shoot your way out. If you're afraid for yourself you'd better slope now. Only stop worrying about me."

"I don't reckon you'll believe I'm scared for myself," he stiffly replied. "I was thinking about your grand-dad's words—that a man in danger ain't got any call to be hunting young women's company."

"You're about as sociable to talk to as a blind pinto," she sighed. "See here. What about your killing three men in Idaho City?"

"It ain't a pretty thing to tell a young woman. Who told you?"

"Grandfather. Three men in one night. It's very terrible!"

He knew Old Idaho had told her nothing about the background of the triple killing, nor did he feel he could explain so long as the cloud was over him. He contented himself with gloomily reminding:—

"Not one of them would be less dead if he was the only one I potted."

"I'm not blaming you, Shoshoni. I know it must be all right. Only it is so awfully terrible. Three men, one right after another!"

"But Mushet and Burnham went out practically together. I was shooting fast," he anxiously explained. As an afterthought he asked, "How much did your grandfather tell you?"

"Said you left the gulch, went to Idaho City, shot three men to death in a saloon, and that you're being hunted for it with a price on your head. I know you couldn't do such a terrible thing just because you were bloodthirsty."

" Much obliged. That's all he said ? "

" All ? Shoshoni ! You don't mean there's any more ? "

" Just the three."

And the misery returned to his heart. The old man had said nothing to exculpate him in any degree. It was impossible for him to interpose any defence while he was in hiding. And while he believed he could impose on her credulity in almost any matter, because she was friendly and wished to believe in him, he did not have the time to tell the truth. He had hoped to have her implicit faith until explanations could establish the facts. He never had had to produce evidence to satisfy Black Cloud. The Indian took it for granted his white brother was all right.

" Let's not talk about it any more now," he said.

" But when and where will it end ? " she asked.

" There's one more bit of trouble to be cleared up and then I'll be free to come and go."

" But no more killings ? "

" Not unless some one jumps me. I've told you about my father being killed. I will add this. The three men were his murderers."

" They were the shadows ! " she whispered.

" The shadows. Always at my heels. Ever since I was a boy. They drove me to living with the Indians."

He realised it was impossible to satisfy a woman with a half-confidence ; and that it was equally impossible to make clear for her the things which still puzzled him. If the truth ever came out as to who murdered Lucky Tom then he could explain from the beginning. Then he would say all the things his tongue now found it so difficult to utter, and which his heart was impatiently urging him to tell. Speaking as he would to a man, he brusquely said :—

" Well, let it go at that. I reckon the mare's wondering why I don't come."

She was nonplussed by his abruptness. She felt as if a black blanket had been thrown over her. She was recalling his words when he rode away from the gulch ; when he had said he was staying there for the sake of being near her. That brief confession had remained warm in her memory, and now it gave hurt to her heart that he should be willing to ride into the night and leave nothing but commonplaces for her to think about. She shyly tested him, asking :—

" Why do you stay in the gulch ? "

Instead of the hoped-for answer he frankly confessed, " It's the safest hiding-place until the Indians show up."

" I'm glad you're safe," she wearily told him as she turned back to the cabin.

" Miss Harry," he impulsively called after her ; " I'd give something handsome if I could talk plain to you."

Her face burned with shame as she recalled when she had been impelled, without fully understanding the driving power of her impulse, to lead him into some expression of sentiment. He had ignored that opportunity and thereby had caused her to fear she had been unmaidenly. She would blaze no more trails for him to turn his back upon.

" Don't you worry about that, Shoshoni," she coolly advised him. " But I've had enough of skulking and hiding to last me a lifetime." Then she was at the door and faintly calling a " good-night " over her shoulder.

He returned to his mare, his high hopes as low as the grayish-white dust under his feet.

" I'm a fool to hang around her," he bitterly confided to the darkness. " It ain't fair to her so long as I'm

muzzled and can't explain everything. No man has a right to win a woman's love and then make her unhappy by telling her he's liable to cash-in any minute. Love?" And he laughed without merriment. "I'm gitting ahead fast in my notions. She'd set me down as crazier'n her grand-pap if she guessed what's filling my fool head. Be sensible, Shoshoni Hale. She's a young girl and ain't cluttering up her mind with any soft thinking. She feels things ain't what they ought to be. And she's right so long's a reward is up for my hide. Well, pinch of something sweet, we'll be going."

The mare whinnied softly and pressed against him. "You're all right, girl. Don't have to explain nothing to you. But I wish Black Cloud would hurry up. My medicine is no good. If his ain't got the proper power I reckon it's about the end of Shoshoni Hale. And we won't come here any more till my slate's washed clean, little lady. It ain't fair to her."

Like many another resolve where a woman is concerned he could not control his abiding impulse. He came to the cabin again and again. On each visit, always paid at night, he handed over a bag of dust for Old Idaho's edification and worry. The old man was torn between the joy of possession and the fear that there was much he was losing. When Hale and the girl were alone she was irritated to the edge of anger by his behaviour. He seemed anxious to be with her, but each visit found him more non-committal. She became enraged at herself for meekly following him outside into the darkness to listen to his awkward efforts to say conventional things. She could not vision the loneliness of the man, hiding in the gulch and having no human contacts except as he risked a visit to the cabin.

One day Jack Gorman rode up to the cabin, and she

found his warm, boyish manner to be a great improvement over Hale's sombre moods. Gorman joked her grandfather into high spirits. He talked nonsense to her until her ears burned. Here was a man who understood youth, who understood her heart even when she herself was puzzled. She was glad he came. He chased some of the shadows from her soul. He made her laugh. He was like the sunshine which he did not have to avoid. Hale was like the night, which always masked his movements.

Gorman was older than Hale, but he seemed to be much younger. There was too much mystery surrounding Hale. He lived in a circle of tragedies. Why did he stick to the name of Hale when his real name was Harris? Not that she imagined the reason was in the least tainted with the unwholesome. But it built up another enigma. It even hinted at fear. If fear, why didn't he meet it and rout it? He carried two revolvers and a rifle.

Yet it was impossible for her to suspect him of even spasmodic cowardice. The gruesome encounter in the saloon alone prohibited the thought. She decided to question Gorman about the fight, and in reply to her query he said:—

“That’s for Shoshoni to tell. I can’t meddle in his affairs except to lend him a hand when it comes to a show-down. He fought against big odds. He gave the skunks a chance that I’d never have given.”

“The sheriff is still after him?”

“You bet he is, Miss Harry. And Ferd Patterson still lords it over the jail and walks around town with a deputy tagging at his heels. No rush and hurry to get justice to working on that case. Shoshoni Hale is a mighty fine man. Better even than you imagine.”

He was thinking of the gold dust Hale had substituted

for the bogus dust. And he regretted that she would never know the truth of that affair.

Had he spoken slightly of Hale she would have resented it hotly. His praise, however, centred her thoughts on the things Hale had left unsaid.

"I don't spend much time thinking about Shoshoni's good qualities," she said. "He's been good to us by taking us to a place where granddaddy could hide until he could prove how silly the charge against him was. But Shoshoni was going there to hide, and his reason for hiding is stronger than ours ever was. I didn't want to go. It made it seem like granddaddy was guilty. But that's all ended."

Gorman pondered over her speech with many shrewd glances at her composed face. Surely she was no lovesmitten maid, he told himself; and the great hope entered his heart. They were outdoors, seated on the log that served for a door-step. Old Idaho was at the table inside, checking up his bags of dust and quite buried beneath his calculations.

Gorman hesitated, and made several false starts, and at last blurted, "Miss Harry, I want to ask sort of a personal question."

She smiled at his gravity and wondered what refreshing bit of nonsense he was about to release. She encouraged him with a nod. She was amused to discover he was embarrassed. It was the first time she had found him lacking in assurance.

"Here goes!" he desperately warned. "Are you Shoshoni Hale's girl?"

She was silent so long he believed he had deeply displeased her. Her voice was scarcely audible when she answered:—

"That is a personal question. No wonder you found it hard to ask it."

"It had to be asked," he bluntly replied. "All the

cards on the table, face up. Then we know where we're at. Shoshoni's my friend. I wouldn't cut into his game to save my life. So the question had to be asked."

"Up to now you've been reckoning I was his girl?" she muttered.

"Had to. Any man would be a fool not to make a play for you. Every honest man can't help doing it. That is, if he thinks you're not bespoke."

"Shoshoni Hale never, as you put it, made a play for me. I'm not his girl."

He was silent for half a minute, then told her, "Honest, I almost feel sorry for old Shoshoni. But some one always loses. Miss Harry, I'm sitting in to win. I hope I shall feel mighty glad for Jack Gorman mighty soon. When I find out I'm a loser I'll feel powerful bad."

"High time you was riding back to town, Mister Jack Gorman," she muttered, rising and smoothing out her gown. "I ain't *any* man's girl."

"Anyway, I'm free to talk," he pleaded. "There's no reason why I shouldn't talk once."

"I'm not hankering to listen just now. You trot back home."

"I'm coming again, Miss Harry. I'm coming mighty soon. I'm coming, and you're going to hear the talk I fetch along."

"Good-bye."

Before he could speak further she was in the cabin and was arousing her grandfather from his dreaming. Gorman waved his hand and called out to Old Idaho and secured his horse.

"Put up the dust, granddaddy," she coaxed. "Come outdoors and walk around."

Knitting his brows he fretfully complained, "I'll put up the dust, but I'd feel *a* heap better if there

was more of it to put away. Hale's taking too much."

"Oh, I do wish you wouldn't say such things!"

Her grandfather hastily explained, "I don't mean he's taking more'n he says. But fifty per cent. of what he picks up is too much. Entirely too much. He's welcome to hide in the gulch. I ain't making any fuss over that. Yet there's the terrible risk he'll be dogged there an' the diggings filled up with strangers. Mind you, I ain't fussing if he helps himself to a fair amount, but when he keeps holding back bag after bag, each as big, or bigger, as these he fetches here—Good Lord! I don't even know how he weighs it. Prob'ly fills a couple and makes a guess. How do I know that each time he comes I ain't gitting a bag a *little* smaller than t'other? Why, Harry, don't you understand? He's making as much, or more, out of it than I be!"

She could have wept, but neither words nor weeping would dislodge the old man's obsession. He had changed much and for the worse ever since the investigating committee had exonerated him of passing counterfeit dust. She had watched the spirit of avarice grow like the shadows consuming the ridge at twilight. The gulch was his mania. It no longer served to remind him he had no legal, no moral claim on the diggings. He had grown to believe no one had the colour of a right to the hidden gulch besides himself. The girl had hoped the mood would pass, but daily she saw him sinking deeper into the slough of greed.

She endeavoured to soothe him by reminding, "You know Hale's an honest man."

"Honest?" he bitterly repeated; and then raised a cackling laugh. "Harry; listen to an old truth. No man can know his own honesty until he's had two experiences—with gold and with a woman. Hale was

honest, I reckon, as a road builder. He was honest as a hunter in the mountains. He is honest with his Injun friends. But who can say he's honest with gold? Any more'n we'd know that he'd be honest with a woman?"

"Oh, that's too cruel!" she cried. And she turned away and fought back the tears.

"You talk like a baby. What do you know about the world, about life?" he angrily continued. "You don't know nothing about men. Hale's walking over a rich gold mine every day. How many men in Idaho Territory can do that and not try to hog it all? Don't men lie, steal, and murder for gold? Ain't it human natur' for a man to help himself out of lost diggings when he'd never think, mebbe, of helping himself out of a man's pocket?"

"But it's not true, and I know it," she passionately retorted. "And being honest with a woman!"

"Reckon I can't talk about that part of it with you," he mumbled. He was beginning to feel uncomfortable. He was vaguely fearing he had aroused a storm he might be unable to subdue. "If your ma had lived she'd a-told you things as a matter of course. Many men, dishonest in their hearts, will go straight in everyday life just along of their pride. But when it comes to much gold and women no man can tell how he'll act up. If he's a wise man he'll know no amount of pride will keep him straight when facing a gold mine, or a pretty woman. Nothing but bed-rock honesty will do that."

"That's the sort of honesty that Shoshoni Hale has," she insisted.

"Well, I don't know. He's coming here quite reg'lar. What's he talk to you about?"

"Oh, nothing in particular."

"Tried to make any fool love to my girl?"

"No!" She said it so fiercely that the old man blinked his eyes.

"That's to his credit," he mumbled. "He ain't in no position to talk love to no woman. No man is who's charged with murder."

"It was in self-defence!" she eagerly insisted.

"The three fellers in Idaho City? Mebbe. Prob'ly. But he took the fight to them."

"They'd been chasing him for years. They murdered his father. Jack Gorman says he gave them an even chance when he ought to have shot them down like dogs."

"I don't say he wasn't within his right," Idaho slowly conceded. "We'll agree he was. But I was thinking of Lucky Tom."

She gaped in amazement, then her eyes dilated with horror. "Why, you can't believe that stuff!" she cried. "He was that man's friend. Shoshoni Hale may be a fool in some things, but he's no murderer."

They talked no more for many minutes. The girl wallowed in misery and was unable to wade out. The old man had reverted to that which tormented him daily—Hale's continued presence in the gulch. As he sat there, his hands gripping the edge of the table and wondering how much longer Hale would have the run of the diggings, he found himself suddenly dwelling on a new and terrible possibility. With a groan he raised both hands and smacked them down on the table.

"Granddaddy! Are you sick?" she gasped, running to him and passing an arm over his shoulder.

"Mortal sick at heart!" he groaned. And he tossed several bags of dust on the floor behind the chest as if they contained so much dirt. "It's all a game of his. What a poor fool I've been not to guess it before! What a poor old fool!"

"You lie down and let me get——"

"Stop talking stuff! I don't need to be babied. I want my rights. By Godfry, I'll have 'em!" And again his two gnarled hands made the table jump.

Wide-eyed with fear she drew back and watched him. She believed his reason suddenly had collapsed. Her terror diminished a bit when he calmly rose and picked up the bags and carefully locked them in the chest. She was dumb with horror when he came to her and in a low voice stated:—

"Hale's been finding di'mon's on my diggings. He's been pouching di'mon's and turning over to me some measly dust to keep me quiet. He fetches me a bag of dust. Ho, ho!"

His senile laughter was horrible in the girl's ears; it was explosive with insane wrath. Raising his voice to a shout he cried, "In God's mercy why shouldn't he fetch me dust, worth eighteen dollars an ounce, so long as he can pouch di'mon's worth a thousand dollars apiece even for the teeny ones." Dropping his voice to a tense whisper he went on, "Harry, sure as the sun crawls over Sawtooth Range to-morrow morning that's what Shoshoni Hale's up to. Pouching my di'mon's!"

She burst into passionate weeping. The old man paced the floor. Between her sobs she managed to say, "How he'd be with a woman—I don't know. But with gold—diamonds—I know he's honest."

Her tears continued until Old Idaho halted and stared down on her shaking shoulders with a glimmer of concern in his gaze. He attempted to soothe her, saying:—

"There, there, child. Don't cry any more. We won't talk about it any more. I'll try to think as you think."

She was tormented by fragments of evil dreams that night. She was stealing into the gulch while the first thunderstorms succeeded in crossing the river and

invading the range below. By the glare of the lightning she saw Hale picking up huge diamonds and hiding them. There were many diamonds on the ground, and the light from these, when the lightning ceased, illumined the scene. Then she saw Hale walking with women, his arms over their shoulders, and the women had no faces.

In the last dream he was alone with Pinaquana. He had halted the mare on a low hill, with the grass reaching to his stirrups. He was oblivious to the circle of men creeping upward through the tall grass. The circle contracted until the men were almost upon him. She tried to cry out a warning, and awoke to find the early sun streaming through the cheap curtains. In the living-room her grandfather was making coffee. She rose and put on her boy's clothes.

After breakfast she was immensely relieved when her grandfather evinced an interest in his gardens. For several days he had neglected them. Now he was keen to work and she aided him until midday. More than once he called on her to admire certain vegetables. In the afternoon a thunderstorm was loosed by the mountains, only, unlike the one in her dream, it was burned up before reaching the plains.

Old Idaho watched the defeat of the storm and remarked, "Pretty soon rain'll be pounding down on this cabin. How'd you like to spend the winter in Idaho City?"

"I'd love it!"

He smiled and nodded his white head and promised:—

"It's more'n half likely that we can. It's too danged lonesome here in the winter. And nothing to do. They have dances and parties at Idaho City, just the rinktums a girl likes. Then there's the sliding clubs for them that's fond of out-doors; and that's where you'd fit in fine, Harry. Placerville Champion Sliding Club has

never got over the hiding Idaho City give it last year. Placerville challenged and put up twenty-five hundred dollars as her share of the stake. She was banking on her cutter, *Flying Cloud*, taking the best out of three. The slide was from the top of Granite Street to Wolf Creek, each cutter carrying four men. Both towns bet themselves empty, and derned if Idaho City's *Wide West* didn't carry off the money ! I reckon there was some dancing and some parties and dinners after that ! Lordy, but them was gay times ! ”

“ I'd love that,” she murmured.

“ I reckon you would. Then there's the *French Frigate*, that carries twenty men, and the fastest thing on runners in the basin. Some of the boys 'low they can build one to beat her. And my little girl will shine there, and be happy, too.”

“ I'm happy when you're happy,” she told him.

Thus despite the disagreeable night the girl found the day filled with much that pleased her. Her grandfather was more as he had been when they first came to the valley. In truth, she could not recall a time when he was so willing to talk with her, let alone to discuss amusements and the things which would engage her fancy. Not once during the day did he go to the chest and examine his gold, although he did say he should take it to Idaho City for safe-keeping within a day or so.

Until dark he worked outdoors and she helped him. After supper he made no move to take out the bags of dust, but remained content to smoke his pipe before the blazing fireplace. Now he had nothing to say ; and yet the girl was happy, for his face was benevolent and placid. The quiet of the room was broken by a low rap on the door, and Shoshoni Hale again stood inside the threshold.

He greeted the two with more than usual warmth. There was a sparkle of exultation in his gray-green eyes

as, according to his custom, he advanced to the table and threw down a bag of dust. But contrary to his habit Old Idaho did not seize the bag and greedily estimate its weight. He waved his pipe in friendly welcome and said:—

“Take a chair, Shoshoni. Put the bag away, little girl. How’s everything at the gulch?”

“Just the same. Deadly dull. I think I shall be pulling out pretty soon.”

“Sho! You don’t say. Going up into the mountains mebbe? Going to den up for the winter?”

“I’m in hopes to be free to go where I wish. How are you, Miss Harry?”

“Fine, Shoshoni. Your friend Jack Gorman called the other day. I like him.”

“Every one likes him who knows him,” was the ready response.

“Nothing new at the gulch? No di’mon’s yet?”

The old man chuckled as he put the question, and Hale grinned to show he appreciated the joke. Then he became thoughtful and fumbled in his pockets.

“If you hadn’t spoke of diamonds I’d plumb forgot it,” he said. “And I packed it all the way here for Miss Harry. It’s the nearest to a diamond we’ll ever see in the gulch. It’s pretty.” He handed over a quartz crystal, small and as transparent as glass.

Before the girl could take it Old Idaho’s long arm shot forward and his fingers had snatched it from Hale’s hand. With a little cry of delight he held it up to the light and marvelled at its transparency and the reflection of the candle’s gleam along the polished planes.

“What is it?” he whispered.

“Not worth two bits, Idaho. Only a little quartz crystal. Surely you’ve seen many of them.”

“I never seen nothing like it afore,” hoarsely muttered

Idaho. "It's smooth and clear's a di'mon', I reckon."

"Diamonds are entirely different, Idaho," said Hale. "It's worthless except as a keepsake."

"I see," mumbled the old man, continuing to turn the crystal over between his fingers. "It's master pretty."

"I'm much obliged, Shoshoni," said Miss Harry.

"It's just pretty to look at. Thought you'd like to have it because it comes from the gulch. Probably lots more of 'em there. Probably some big ones. Well, I must be going. Got some business to 'tend to." He glanced at the girl and then toward the door.

She followed him outside and asked:—

"So you're busy to-night?"

He explained:—

"I risked an early start to git a good look at the northern sky-line. And I caught two smokes in the hills north of here. That means Black Cloud is back and wants to talk to me. I must make his camp and be back at the gulch, or within easy striking distance of it, before sun-up."

"And you're quitting the gulch, you say?"

"Very soon now. If the Indian's medicine is strong enough I won't have to stay in hiding much longer."

"You've been making new plans, I'd say."

"Better say I'm thinking of trying a plan that's been stewing inside my head for quite a spell. . . . How it'll work depends on luck . . . and Black Cloud. Do you know, Miss Harry, I've been waiting to git some things straightened out so's I could have a talk with you."

She recalled her experience in the gulch. She remembered each separate visit to the cabin, and his strange awkwardness to approach the subject she had so much at heart. She found herself repeatedly dwelling

on what her grandfather had said concerning the instability of men with gold and women. Her brooding left her bitter with herself and toward him. The darkness gave her boldness and she answered :—

“ Jack Gorman’s more of a talker than you are.”

“ He still comes here, I reckon ? ”

“ He’s been here, yes.”

His voice sounded a bit odd as he continued, “ Jack’s a good fellow. Reckon it’s easy for him to talk.”

“ Seems to come natural to him.”

He was silent for a bit, and then said, “ Well, I have a long ride. Some day I can talk.”

He was moving away from her, and desperate that she had failed to arouse any emotion in him, she hurriedly confided : “ Jack was down here t’other day. He asked me a question.”

The padding sound of his moccasined feet ceased : then his tall figure suddenly stood close beside her. She fell to trembling and drew back, lest he touch her arm and discover her agitation. He quietly asked :—

“ S’pose you answered that question ? ”

His quietness, his seeming readiness to stand apart, his failure to express any concern, all goaded her into a show of resentment. She must either go on, or else give way to helpless weeping. In an even voice she told him :—

“ Yes, I answered him. He asked if I was your girl. I told him I wasn’t.”

There was silence between them just as there was the night between them. When he spoke she scarcely recognised his voice, yet it was low and his speech was unhurried :—

“ Jack’s a good man,” he began. “ Honest. Square. You’re lucky to git a man like him. Wishing you both best of luck. Good health. Nothing but happiness. Wind’s sharp to-night. You’ll be gitting a chill.”

Then he startled her by whistling shrilly on his fingers. Faint hoofbeats answered him immediately. She dully realised the end had come to what had been a pleasant road unless she spoke quickly. Her time of grace was cut down each second by the approaching hoofs.

"Jack's your friend. He wanted to know——"

"Of course. That's like him. He's square," he mumbled, his voice detached as though his thoughts were far from her. "He's lucky. There ain't only so many face-cards in the deck."

She wanted him to cease talking so she could speak. Nearer came the pounding hoofs to trample on her heart, to carry him away. She tried to speak, to say something to detain him until she could think coherently. But her mind was paralysed, her tongue was paralysed. She could not shake off the stupor which held her dumb and helpless.

Only one sense seemed to be functioning ; she heard the flying hoofs sweeping down upon them. Then the intelligent animal was standing between them. With scarcely a pause the mare swept on, and not until she cut through the light streaming from the window did the girl realise she was alone. The silhouette of the bowed figure released her tongue.

"Shoshoni!" she whispered, although she endeavoured to scream the name. "Wait!"

The scuffling hoofs smothered the low appeal—the darkness had taken Shoshoni Hale.

"He'll come again! He'll come back!" she despairingly told herself, as she lifted her clenched hands and tilted her head to catch the crescendo of returning hoofs. But the receding tattoo of the "little lady's" swift-flying feet ended in nothingness.

"Oh, God!" she sobbed as she stumbled toward the door. "He must come again! Just once more!"

Old Idaho was sitting before the fire, holding the

crystal in his hands. Without turning his head he asked, "Ain't Shoshoni coming in?"

"No, I reckon it's his good-bye visit," she told him. Then she turned away and gritted her teeth to keep back the sobs.

"His good-bye visit!" dully repeated Old Idaho. "I wanted to speak to him. He must know there's things I want to talk about. He must come back here once more."

"He goes back to the gulch, but he won't come here again," she managed to tell him. "I'm very tired. Good-night."

She kissed the top of his white head, and his mind, blinded by the worthless crystal, detected nothing of her grief. After she had gone to her room he remained before the fire, revolving the crystal between thumb and finger, his eyes staring at the coals as if beholding visions. And as he stared he discovered something that brought a grim smile to his lips.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MEDICINE OF BLACK CLOUD

BEFORE sunrise had dispersed the gathering around the gaming tables in the Gold Dust Saloon a man burst into the room and excitedly cried :—

“ Shoshoni Hale, Injun feller, is in jail for murdering Lucky Tom ! ”

The room quickly emptied into the street. Other night resorts quickly contributed men and women. Out of the clamour of conjecture and wild theories the truth finally emerged. Hale was captured the day before within a few miles of the Prescott cabin. Few if any of the excited throng felt the need of rest. The arrest of Hale was a tremendous event and was entirely unexpected. There was a world of drama in what must follow. Surely there would be grim tragedy.

It had been supposed he had taken refuge in the mountains. Those who had proclaimed Sheriff Bowen as a useless cog in the law's machinery began to wonder if the man had not been too hastily judged. To lay Hale by the heels was a noteworthy achievement for any officer to score. It was even more astounding that the man had been taken alive.

As if the taking of Hale were not enough to key Idaho City up to great mental agitation, there was added the scare of an Indian uprising. In the drinking places it was heatedly declared to be a fact that Hale's Indians were coming to sack the town and rescue him. The more sober-minded citizens, on being aroused from sleep,

hurried forth and gravely investigated the story. Their examination of the evidence resulted in a denial of the rumour.

There was no band of Indians approaching Pioneer City and Placerville with hostile intent and with the ultimate purpose of attacking Centerville and Idaho City. After the denial had been issued several newcomers, impeccable witnesses, distressed the citizens' committee by declaring the presence of the red men was no fantasy. The boss of a saw-mill on the outskirts of Placerville came in and insisted he had seen and counted two score warriors, mounted and armed, near his mill.

For a while the proximity of the Indians diverted attention from the prisoner in the jail. Scouts were sent out and arrangements made to send aid to the sister towns in event of an attack. It was the common belief in Idaho City that the dark hour had arrived when the Nez Perces and Shoshoni were uniting with the Blackfeet over the mountains to carry the pipe against all whites in the territory and the Beaver Head country.

The scouts returned quickly, having met messengers from Placerville. The latter came to report that some forty Indians had approached close to the town but had departed without firing a shot. Public interest promptly centred on the jail. Buena Vista Bar emptied itself into the town. It was known that the neighbouring towns were sending large delegations to witness the disposition of Hale.

Not until noon did Sheriff Bowen show himself on the street, and not then until the citizens' committee had sent word for him to explain how the capture had been effected. He met representatives of the committee in the Craft and Vantine store. He had been convinced, he explained, that Hale was hiding somewhere along the

Payette River road despite all reports that the man had fled north. He had sent his deputies into the suspected region frequently and at last one of them had caught a glimpse of Hale riding toward the hills south of the river.

"The rest was easy," he added. "I took my men and went down there, and Shoshoni Hale rode right into our arms. For once he was off his guard. You never saw such a surprised man. Show fight? Hardly, with our guns covering him. When he realised the game was up he didn't want to make trouble. Never see a man lose his sand and go to pieces as he did. I took his big guns from him and he didn't make a yip. Now what you fellows going to do about it? Does the law get a chance to try him or will you string him up? I'm going to do my duty, but I don't hanker to kill off any towns people in defending him. He's a bad one."

"You'll know when the committee takes any action," Vantine told him. "And when it does you step aside. We're waiting now for Ben Ripley. He helped us organise, and we want to hear what he has to say. There's talk about the town toughs lynching Hale off hand. We don't want anything of that sort."

"I'm to fight off one mob, but step aside for the other," snarled Bowen. "If you want any street mob stopped you can be on hand to help. I'll swear you all in as special deputies. As for Ripley, he hasn't been seen since yesterday morning. In due time the law will dispose of Shoshoni Hale's case."

"So's Christmas coming," jeered Vantine. "The law's taking lots of time in disposing of Patterson's case, we notice. The grand jury hasn't reported on it yet. If we'd been organised when Pinkham was murdered Patterson's room at the jail would be empty

long before this. But we're keeping hands off just to see if the law will work."

"I don't have nothing to do with indicting and trying prisoners," Bowen uneasily reminded him. "It's my job to catch 'em. A man's wanted; I go and nail him. Now that thousand dollars your committee told me to offer. Seems it will have to be split up between me and my boys."

"You're welcome to the reward," Vantine shortly told him. "From now on, however, we'll expect you to catch a few men before any reward is offered. Seen anything of Jack Gorman this morning?"

"Nary hair nor hide. Been expecting him to show up at the jail. He'n Hale are friends. Well, I must be going back. Don't want any mob snaking Hale out to stretch him."

In returning, however, he took time to step into the Gold Dust and glance over the crowd. He was besieged with queries but held his head high and was deaf to all questions. He forced his way to the gambling-room, stale with the night's dissipation. It was practically empty. One of the women of the place, with the contours of death showing in her face under the merciless sunlight, suspended a game of solitaire to ask listlessly for the news.

"Nothing new. They ain't hung him yet."

"He's a man," she muttered. "I seen him kill those three devils."

"You'll probably have the pleasure of seeing him hung for killing a peaceable miner," he sternly replied.

She smiled knowingly, then quailed under his menacing gaze. "I'm looking for Judge Curks," he informed. "Been in here this morning?"

"No. That little runt Riply come in here yesterday and talked with Curks. They went out together. Ain't seen the judge since."

The sheriff hurried to the street, much puzzled over the disappearance of his Boise City friend. Curks was not given to roaming. When not at his room he could always be found at the Gold Dust. Nor would he be returning to Boise City before learning Old Idaho's secret. Elbowing his way through the groups on the street the sheriff repeatedly refused to pause and enlighten the curious with details of the capture. He smiled grimly when Three Spot, the town's leading drunkard, began yelling :—

“ Hang Hale ! ”

“ Long about this evening,” the sheriff told himself. “ Not enough liquor behind 'em yet to make 'em real ugly. They'll have to organise and find a leader.”

He found Patterson pacing the living-room of the jail, his eyes glittering with triumph. At every turn he halted before the table to gloat over Hale's two Colt's revolvers. Picking up one of the guns and playing with it he told Bowen :—

“ I want to go down and see him.”

“ And I don't want you to. Put that gun down, Ferd. You musn't do anything to attract attention to you. Vantine was saying this morning the law's too slow in hanging you. You keep away from Hale, or you'll find yourself hooked up with him when they rush the jail. I'm doubting if you'd be safe over night if Jack Gorman and Ben Ripley—especially Ripley—could be found.”

“ That's bad talk, Bowen,” gritted Patterson. “ You're too free with your hanging talk. If they turn me off you'll follow along the same trail inside of thirty minutes. *I've arranged for that.*”

“ Arranged ? Gawdamighty ! You've planned to git me stretched ? ” hoarsely demanded the sheriff.

“ Not unless you try some game. Keeping me alive is the best medicine you can have. Here's another

thing I don't like. You're too sly about how you caught Hale. It isn't very important, now he's bagged; but if you'll hold back in one thing, you will in others. Once more I ask, how was the trick turned?"

"I'm not playing any game. Ain't I tried to keep you safe'n sound? As for Hale, we laid for him. Took him by surprise. Threw a gun on him—"

"Bah! You couldn't catch a crippled ox!" broke in Patterson. "How did you know where to find him? When to go after him?"

"I've told you all," was the sullen answer. "You don't talk like a friend. And this will be mob night. If you've fixed it so harm will come to me you'll be dead before that happens. Your talk about having a gang lay for me makes bad friends. If some one has promised you certain things he won't be keen to come through after once you're turned off. Dead man's poor pay. I've warned you for your own good to keep quiet, to keep out of sight. If you don't, and they do come after you, I can't save your neck. That's flat."

Four words of this talk impressed the gambler as being pregnant with truth. "Dead man's poor pay." If a drunken or a sober mob took the notion to hang him he would surely hang. He loosened the collar of his soft shirt and surrendered.

"We musn't quarrel. I know you're all right, Bowen. I was joking in my talk. If Gorman gets back before night he'll try to stop the mob. I think Riply will be for a hanging, only he'll want it done by the new committee and after they've gone through some form of taking evidence to satisfy them Hale's guilty. We simply want him hung. Do you know where Hale's been hiding?"

"No. He was riding near the river when I caught him."

"He must be made to tell. He replaced Old Idaho's

bogus dust with the real article. Old man was swept off his feet when the assayer said it was good. To make the swap Hale had to be within an easy ride of the cabin. He had to have rich diggings near. He got the gold from Lucky Tom's diggings. Tell him you'll let him skip if he'll tell."

"I've been at him and at him all the morning," growled the sheriff. "I've told him he'll surely hang to-night unless he gets loose. I've promised to turn him loose if he'll tell. But he acts like a man that's drunk. Just sits and mopes and stares at the floor."

"But he must talk! Send for Curks. He's a master hand to worm things from a man."

"Curks is off the map. Can't find him anywhere. Funny, too; for he's sure to hear of Hale's capture."

"Curks, Riply and Gorman! It's queer. It's more'n that. It's crooked," muttered the gambler.

He picked up a deck of cards and dealt them face up in several piles. With a deep breath of relief he cried:—

"My card comes up in the lucky pile again. To hell with your mob! I believe in my luck. The cards say I won't swing. I'm through being scared."

The entrance of a deputy halted the conversation. The man grinned and informed them:—

"Pert young gal in boy's clothes mortal keen to see Shoshoni Hale."

The sheriff and Patterson exchanged glances. It was Patterson who gave the order, directing:—

"At the end of five minutes send her in here."

The sheriff endorsed this with a nod and, after the man had withdrawn, was reminded by the gambler:—

"The girl knows about the diggings. She can be made to tell."

"I think Old Idaho knows about 'em," said Bowen, and he turned aside to hide a slight smile.

Patterson darted a murderous look at him, then smoothed out his features and said:—

“Perhaps so. But you skip out before the girl comes in. I’ll put it to her plain—she must tell or see Hale swing.”

“She’ll ask to see Hale first. He’ll tell her to keep shut.”

“No one must see Hale except you and Curks. We’ll play on the girl’s fears. Then we’ll play on Hale’s fears for the girl. Between the two of them one will weaken.”

“No harm trying it. Just tell her this is my office, that I’ll be back soon. And, Ferd, be careful. Don’t let your temper make a fool of you.”

The gambler laughed good-naturedly and motioned for Bowen to leave. But the moment he was alone his pale face became convulsed with rage.

“Damn him!” he whispered. “A low, sneaking, yellow dog! Now I’m in here he thinks to talk brash to me. He thinks to hog it all by pumping Old Idaho. I’ll pay him out for it. Wish Curks was here. Wonder if he’s got some game on the side. Most likely. I must get out of here, or they’ll all work to do me.”

A light step in the corridor ended his disturbing soliloquy and set him into a deep chair, which stood back to the door. He was invisible until one came close to the table. He had barely seated himself before the door swung open. He heard her advancing to the table, where the big guns acted as a magnet. He glanced up and met her surprised gaze.

“I didn’t want to see you!” she exclaimed.

He sat up and smiled.

“You want to see the sheriff, I suppose. Take a chair. He’ll be here in a minute.”

“I want to see Shoshoni Hale,” she corrected.

“But you’ll have to see Sheriff Bowen first. Take a chair and be comfortable.

She seated herself on the edge of a chair and stared at him thoughtfully.

"Prisoners are taken good care of here," she remarked.

"Some are," he qualified.

"Where's Shoshoni Hale?" she demanded.

"In a cell."

"What will they do with him?"

"Hang him."

She clenched her small hands, and the muscles of her slim throat worked convulsively as she endeavoured to speak.

"That's it, that's what the mob will try to do," he added. "Hale can escape if he'll tell where he got the dust he planted in your cabin when he removed the counterfeit dust your grandfather had hidden there."

"You lie, and you know it," she cried out in a choked voice. "My grandfather had no counterfeit dust."

"You're the first one to say that word to me and not swallow it," he muttered, staring at her balefully. "I think you're the only one that can do it. I'll take 'most anything from you. We'll not talk about your grandfather. You want Hale to go free?"

She bowed her head, not trusting herself to speak for fear she would succumb to the hysteria now besieging her reason. Hale's two hand guns told her of his helpless condition.

"It's easy then," continued Patterson soothingly. "You tell us where he got his dust. We know he's been working Lucky Tom's diggings."

"There isn't anything I can tell you," she slowly replied. "I don't want to talk with you, or any one. I must see Hale."

"Hale murdered Lucky Tom. He killed three other men. Idaho City says he murdered them."

"That's a lie. He never killed the miner."

Patterson's face, bleached out by many nights at the gaming table, became ghastly under the contempt of her tone. He felt the devil in him rising and struggling to escape control. Reason told him to choke the beast back, and yet for the moment the secret diggings were of almost no account. He softly told her :—

"You've said that twice. The third time you'll pay. Pay my way."

"That's another lie," she told him.

"You young limb!" he snarled.

The beast was loosed. Lunging forward he grabbed across the table at her wrists. She tried to escape, but not before he had captured a hand. Instantly her free hand caught up one of Hale's revolvers. Poking the muzzle between his eyes, she warned :—

"Quit, or I'll shoot."

He released her and picked up the other gun. She taunted him, saying :—

"Even you don't dare kill a woman—in here. Drop it!"

"I drop," he said.

The weapon clanged on the table, and he sank back in his chair, weak and trembling. She picked up the second gun and informed him :—

"I won't wait any longer. You can tell the sheriff I got tired."

He leaped to his feet and demanded :—

"Where are you going—with those guns?"

"To see Shoshoni Hale," she answered, backing toward the door.

"Not by a damn sight!" he cried. "Grab her, Bowen!"

She wheeled, and his ruse almost succeeded. He leaped forward to seize her, but with a twist of her

lithe body she evaded the rush and brought him to a plunging halt.

"Get back to your chair," she warned.

He retreated. The door opened and Bowen thrust in his head. Instantly the girl had him covered and was sliding toward him.

"Open that door," she commanded.

"See here, young lady—" he furiously began.

She cut him short by cocking a gun. His hands instinctively went above his head.

"Now lead me to Shoshoni Hale's cell," she ordered.

"If any one tries to stop me I'll shoot."

Their end of the corridor was empty for the minute, and as the sheriff felt the gun prodding his back he lost no time in conducting her to the prisoner's cell. When he halted before a grated door she told him to open it.

"Are you crazy?" he wrathfully shouted.

Hale ran to the door and stared bewildered at his visitor.

"Be ready to come out, Shoshoni, when he opens the door. I've got your guns. I came the minute I heard about it."

"Great snakes!" stammered Hale. "You, Miss Harry! Bowen, you get out of here!"

"He must open the door—" began the girl; but the sheriff already was running up the corridor.

With a heart-broken sob the girl cried:—

"Oh, you've thrown away your chance, Shoshoni Hale! You've thrown away your chance!"

"God bless you, Miss Harry. But it isn't the right way. I'll see this through. I'll never hide again."

"They'll hang you! They've planned to hang you. They say they'll let you escape if I tell about the diggings. I'll tell gladly—"

"No!" he sternly commanded. "Then they would hang me for sure. You'll tell nothing. You know

nothing. But, Miss Harry, the sight of you is better'n a mile lead in the open with Pinaquana at her best. Go to the stable on the Boise City road——”

“ My horse is there.”

“ Then it won’t bother you any to take a look at Pinaquana. She likes you, being the sensible little lady that she is.”

The hopelessness of it all overcame her. She knew the implacable purpose of Patterson. She knew the sheriff was the gambler’s tool. Between them the two could control Hale’s destiny long enough to see him hanged. She rested her head on the ledge of the door and wept.

He reached a hand through the bars and clumsily patted the dishevelled locks and twisted her hat awry.

“ You go and find Jack Gorman,” he said. “ But you mustn’t come here again. Gorman will do all any man can. I only ask for a chance to prove certain things. They’re taking their time with Patterson. They can give me a day or two.”

“ Can Gorman help you ? ” she eagerly asked.

“ More than any other man. He’s a friend of Ben Riply’s. Riply doesn’t feel friendly to me, I’m thinking. But he’s a just man. Find Gorman. A delay of two or three days will fix everything all right.”

“ I’ll talk to Riply. I’ll make him believe in you.”

“ Riply’s out of town, I think.” He smiled grimly. “ Hand my guns back to the sheriff and find Gorman.”

“ I’ll keep the guns,” she quietly informed him. “ I left my rifle at the stable. I reckon I’ll feel more at home with your guns.”

She hurried down the corridor and found the sheriff and a deputy waiting for her. Both gave ground as she raised a gun.

“ You drop those weapons ! ” shouted the sheriff, infuriated at the thought of the town’s amusement

when the story got out about the girl's success in securing Shoshoni Hale's revolvers.

She gained the outside door, and they did not dare to impede her progress. Once in the street she found herself surrounded by a boisterous crowd, who made many comments but offered her no incivility. Word was passed that she had entered the jail and taken Shoshoni Hale's guns. Several began cheering her with high enthusiasm.

Alarmed at the bearded faces pressing about her, she redoubled her efforts and soon discovered there was none who wished to annoy her. She finally worked her way clear of the crowd, and as the guns attracted notice she hid them in her blouse. Her visit to the jail had been a failure, she told herself, and there was but one place she knew of where she could go and rearrange her plans. This was the Craft and Vantine store, where her grandfather had deposited his gold dust for safe-keeping.

Vantine came to wait on her and readily recognised her. She asked permission to leave the two long Colt revolvers. He eyed her curiously, but asked no questions. After showing her where she could leave the weapons he inquired for her grandfather.

"He left home day before yesterday. From what he said I reckoned he was bringing some dust here to put in your strong-box."

"If he was in town he did not call. Can we help you in any way?"

"If you can help me get Shoshoni Hale out of jail?"

"Hale is safer just now in jail," he told her. "His is a very grave case, Miss Harry."

"He's innocent!" she protested.

"I hope so. I hope he'll have no trouble proving it," he quietly replied.

His words and his manner chilled her. She began to fear that the worst might happen. It was inconceivable, and yet the merchant had his doubts. She waited only to ask where she could find Gorman, and, Vantine being unable to tell her, she returned to the street. She hoped to find him in the jostling crowds, but although she fought her way up and down the streets and waited patiently on various corners she was unsuccessful.

During the afternoon there was a perceptible change in the town's attitude toward Hale, measured by those who were abroad and inclined to be noisy. The curiosity of the morning was being replaced by demands that Hale be hanged forthwith. At first these bloodthirsty demands terrified the girl, but as she gave closer heed she decided the threats were not seriously made, and were either the speech of drunken men, or of outsiders who had hurried to town to witness the excitement and wanted a climax before returning to their scattered claims.

When weary of walking and standing, she returned to the store and was informed by a clerk that both proprietors were at a business session with other merchants. Had she known that it was a secret conference, and that the proposition to hang both Hale and Patterson without waiting for Ben Riply to return was voted down by a narrow margin, she would have forgotten her weariness. As Riply was prominent in the Payette Committee and had worked zealously in organising the Idaho City tribunal, the wish of the conservative section of the new committee to delay action was heeded.

During this serious debate the rough element of the town was growing more bold in demanding Hale's instant demise. Each hour dropped behind by the sun found the milling mob's ferocity greatly increased.

From drunken boisterousness the temper of the idle and vicious changed to animal savagery.

At sunset Vantine and his partner entered the store, their faces reflecting their grave concern. Miss Harry was curled up on a pile of blankets, a disconsolate and pathetic little figure. Beside her were Hale's two guns.

"Lord bless me! A girl dressed like a boy!" exclaimed Craft.

"Prescott's daughter," reminded Vantine. "Miss Harry, I'm sorry you didn't take your horse and ride home. This is no place for you. The town is filled with drunken men. You must go up to my house and be sure to keep indoors."

"Shoshoni Hale? What'll they do with him?" she faintly asked.

"We're waiting for Ben Riply to show up," was Craft's evasive answer. "Shoshoni a friend of yours?"

She nodded, and the tears began creeping from under the long lashes.

Craft gravely continued: "We heard about your taking the guns from the jail. That wasn't a nice thing to do."

"I offered to fetch him out and he wouldn't come," she groaned.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Craft. "Well, it showed he had more confidence in his case than some others have. You come back into our office where you can be alone and more comfortable."

She jumped from the blankets and stuffed the revolvers into the blouse. "Thank you both, but I must see about my horse. Then I may go up to Mr. Vantine's."

Vantine tried to persuade her to go at once, offering to go in person and see that the horse was being properly

cared for, but she stubbornly refused and hurried into the street.

The night came quickly. Lights in saloons and stores illuminated patches of the street. Several street corners were lighted up by small bonfires. Each of these junctions was a rallying-point for the drink-befuddled and the lawless. Through alternate darkness and light the girl made her way to the stable and secured her horse and rifle. She called Pinaquana by name and the mare squealed in great delight at the familiar voice.

"You know her? She belongs to Hale. Wonder who'll git her," said the stable-keeper.

"Shoshoni don't go to sell Pinaquana—you brute!" fiercely retorted the girl.

Clearing her eyes of tears, she turned back to the main thoroughfare. A wild chorus, demanding Hale's life, met her even before she sighted the yelling mob. She dully wondered why the entire community should feel such a terrible enmity against one man. As she galloped to the edge of the crowd filling the street, drunken men jostled against her horse. One brute, foul from drink, recognised her sex and bawled an unprintable name. Her rifle-barrel cracked him over the head and dropped him senseless for others to tread upon. The incident frightened her. It aroused her first fear of danger to herself. She worked the horse up the street in an effort to gain the jail.

Now some subtle intelligence seemed to permeate the various groups, for without any signal, without any message by word of mouth that the girl could note, there began a general movement toward the jail. Bands of men met and became a unit.

At first the movement was a drifting one, almost casual. Soon it became organised with the lynchers walking eight abreast. Curiously enough the overtones of ferocity died down as the mass became purposeful;

and the sullen tramping of the rough boots was worse in Miss Harry's ears than the wildest of screams, or the most vindictive vituperation.

Leaders began to discover themselves, men who acted as file closers. Miss Harry turned her horse down the first cross-street and galloped ahead to intercept the procession. When she sighted it again torches were springing up at various intervals. With distended eyes she watched the long lines approach. She held her arm across her eyes after discovering that the tall man in the lead was carrying a coil of new rope on his arm. He was drunk and walked with an attempt at dignity, as if observing some ritual.

As the head of the procession drew abreast of the girl there was an entire absence of shouting, but there was the voice of doom in the tramping feet. Her slight frame shook and she clutched at the pommel to keep from falling.

Tramp! Tramp! fell the inexorable feet. They were trampling the life from Shoshoni Hale's prostrate body. They were trampling her hopes into the grave. With a queer little cry she wheeled her horse and retreated down the cross street.

Where was Jack Gorman? He claimed to be a friend of Hale. If within twenty miles of Idaho City he must have heard of Hale's capture before this. She turned into the street that ran parallel to Main and rode madly to get to the jail ahead of the mob. The torches had multiplied until they painted a rosy streak in the velvet sky. The street corners and all openings between buildings were filled with women and timid men. The girl was compelled to pull her mount down to a walk when she tried to enter the vantage points long since pre-empted by those who knew the mob was to be fed and that a man was to die. These side gatherings were very quiet.

As she sent her horse drifting sidewise through the silent, waiting masses of spectators there came loud shouting. She was deaf to the objurgations and curses of those her horse ploughed to one side. She believed they had dragged Shoshoni Hale from jail and were hanging him. With a scream she jumped the nervous animal into the main thoroughfare and found herself at the tail end of the procession.

"Hi, sister! Git to hell out of here!" bawled a not unkindly voice.

Ahead was the jail and the bright glare of accumulated torches. She no longer attempted to pick her way, but with shrill cries of warning forced the horse ahead, with the men scrambling aside to escape the prancing hoofs. She rode with her eyes focused on the jail, with her rifle held high, and she left a wake of curses. Those who would have resented her rough passing with something stronger than words were left behind before they could translate their rage into physical acts. And last she ploughed her horse through the front ranks, backed the animal against a building nearly opposite the jail, and leaned forward to learn the truth.

There were two groups of men before the jail and they seemed to be wrangling fiercely. Nor was the flash of steel missing as the torchlight touched on drawn pistol and knife. Close by the girl, men were yelling:

"Time's up! Drag him out! Git out the way, you gospel slingers!"

The girl prodded a fat man in the neck with the muzzle of her rifle, and he leaped convulsively like a dying fish.

"What are they doing?" she asked as he swung his head about and stared stupidly at the brown barrel.

"Gang of store-keepers and a gospel slinger's trying to stop justice," he answered. "Say, don't you know

it hurts when you ram that gun barrel into a feller's neck?"

"They've stopped the lynching?"

"Naw; they ain't stopped no lynching. They're bluffing." Then he turned back and howled: "Ya-a-ah! Hang him! Hang him!"

The rifle barrel cracked down on his thick skull; the horse's hind-quarters caught him fair and dashed him violently against those in front of him.

With a howl of rage he scrambled to his feet and, encouraged by the invectives of the men he had bumped, struggled to get at the girl. A pair of strong arms caught Miss Harry around the waist and pulled her from the saddle.

"Git through that door and into the house, you little fool!" growled the man, pushing her toward the doorway close by and then turning to discourage the advance of the irate citizen.

The horse bolted along the edge of the crowd. Miss Harry slipped through the doorway, still clutching her rifle, and, frantic to behold what was going on, ran upstairs to the second floor and took her place at a window. The tenants of the house must have been out on the street, as she saw no one to question her intrusion as she leaned out of the window and stared down on the wild scene. The man she had felled was up again, leaping and shouting, a part of the savage chorus.

The Big Thought of the night possessed all minds. The torches danced and bobbed, and some went to the ground and threw out many sparks as heavy boots trampled upon them. The street was chaos, yet the girl began to make sense out of the scene. The thin line of men now being pressed back and hurled aside were representative citizens trying to stay the mob. The roar of exultation swept to the building, and the men below the girl's window surged forward.

With the exception of a few square yards before the entrance the space before the jail was packed with hooting, gesticulating madmen. From her elevated position the girl saw the man with the coil of new rope standing in this little opening. A voice was shouting from an upper window of the jail. The mob ceased its wolf cries and the booming voice of its spokesman answered the call from the window. The message was most peremptory and consisted of the one word :—

“ Hale ! ”

Bowen at the window yelled back something about “ law and order,” and “ the wheels of justice.”

Again the booming voice demanded :—

“ Hale ! ”

There was no chance for debate or argument. With the one word this leader swept aside all pleas, all logic, all humanity. The crowd caught up the name, and in staccato volume began shouting : “ Hale ! Hale ! Hale ! ”

Bowen vanished from the window. A command was shouted. There came the nerve-tingling tintinnabulous protest of breaking glass, the splitting crescendo of the stout door’s downfall. A moment of tense silence, as when a murderer pauses to gaze on his work, then a terrific uproar. And all Idaho City knew the mob was inside the jail and had bagged its prey.

The noise in the jail suddenly dropped to nothing. The pandemonium outside was as abruptly hushed. Without a shot being fired in defence of the prisoner he was brought through the doorway, a man clinging to each arm, a dozen men crowding behind him ; and the man with the coiled rope faced about and walked in the lead. Across the street was a stunted white oak, a skeleton of a tree except for a scraggy head-dress, where the more persistent leaves adhered to the tops of the otherwise bare branches.

Miss Harry leaned rigid and helpless across the window sill and stared at the pallid white trunk of the tree. And yet she was abnormally conscious of insignificant details of the tableau. She noted the swagger of the man with the rope—his way of showing regard for the importance of his hideous office. She observed the quiet, orderly demeanour of what had been a ravening mob. For now that the gruesome spectacle was assured each participant relaxed. A man was walking fussily up and down the front line of spectators and urging the people to keep back and not to inconvenience the executioners ; and this although there was no attempt made to intrude on the cleared space.

“ Directly below the window a man cried out :—

“ It’ll be a lively night at the Gold Dust after this is over.” There was much relish in his voice.

After it was over ? Why, then everything would be over ! The world would come to an end so far as Old Idaho’s granddaughter was concerned. Her blood had been ice ; now it was fire. Before she realised her purpose she was shrilly crying :—

“ You stop to hang an innocent man while Lyon and his friends are locating diamond diggings within a few miles of my home ! You turn beasts while wise men are rushing to the lost gold diggings ! You stop to kill, and a fortune waits for the first comers within twenty miles of the Payette ! Every minute you waste here is costing some one a fortune. I’ve been in the lost gulch and have panned out gold. Turn that man loose and find enough free gold to make you all rich for life. Lyon picks up diamonds at the mouth of the gulch while you commit murder ! ”

The man with the rope swung about and gaped wonderingly in an attempt to locate the voice. There was a general stirring throughout the crowd as the leaven began to work. From the jail a voice yelled :—

"Make her shut her mouth! Hang him!"

"That's Patterson! He wants the secret for his own!" she shrilly screamed. "To-day he offered to let Hale go if I'd tell him how to find the gulch."

Hoarse shouts from the mob greeted this charge, and portions of it began to disintegrate. Men glanced suspiciously at their neighbours. Here and there a sudden swirling in the crowd told of the gold hungry working their way down the street. The girl was quick to observe her words had halted the execution. Flushed with hope, she leaned farther from the window and screamed:—

"I'm Harriet Prescott, Old Idaho's granddaughter. I've been in the gulch. It's full of gold. Lyon and Fogus are hunting diamonds at its mouth without knowing it's there. Are you fools, or very rich men, that you're willing to lose fortunes for the sake of murdering an innocent man?"

The withdrawals from the outskirts of the mob became more marked. Small bodies of men hurried through the cross-street. The outmost rim of the massed humanity began to melt away, first as individuals, then in groups, then in masses. From the jail window rang out the accusation:—

"It was Lucky Tom's gulch! Hale murdered him! String him up while you have him!"

"Lucky Tom's lost diggings!"

"Hale stole the Lost Gulch!" another shouted.

As these cries were repeated the man with the rope came to life and threw the coil over a gnarled limb. The noose was already fashioned. All those surrounding Hale were impatient to have it over with so they might join in the search of the new diggings. Hale now raised his powerful voice and begged:—

"Go away, Miss Harry; it'll make it easier for me."

The new rope showed almost white in the torchlight. It wriggled and shook and then became stationary as the noose was thrown over Hale's head. The girl, half out of the window, raised her Henry repeater and began firing. The second bullet cut the rope half through. Before the men holding the free end could brace themselves to pull, the rope was completely severed.

Yells of rage were hurled at the girl, and men started for the house. Pulling one of Hale's guns she sent a bullet into the road and warned :—

“Keep back !”

“Some one drag her out of that house,” howled a man in the background.

“Shoot Hale if she fires again !” roared the voice from the jail.

She threw up the rifle and drilled a hole through the window above the speaker's head. A man laughed hysterically.

“Turn Hale loose and I'll lead you to the lost diggings,” her penetrating falsetto promised.

“She's lying !”

“She's telling the truth !”

“We can find the gulch without any help. We don't want Hale filing any discovery claim. He killed Lucky Tom !”

A cheer greeted the last. Hale was crowded forward so the shortened rope might be thrown over the limb.

“Shoot him if the girl tries to take a hand,” was the general advice offered the executioners.

A revolver was clapped against Hale's head.

“Hi ! What's that ?” yelled a nervous voice.

It was a peculiar resounding rhythm, more of a vibration than a sound. As it obtruded on the mob's comprehension the men holding the rope allowed it to hang slack as they turned their heads and stared

apprehensively into the surrounding darkness. It was a staccato *thudding*, ever growing louder, a menacing diapason, such as children sometimes hear in the night and know to be the heavy footfalls of giants.

It became the warning of many hoof-beats, streaked through with the metallic clickety-click of a rider or two galloping some distance in advance of the main body. And out of the night and among the torches galloped Riply and Gorman. They spurred to the white oak and Gorman cut the rope. Riply drove his mount among the hangmen.

"He's innocent! We have proof he is innocent!" cried Riply. "Let no man harm him. Judge Curks will tell you Hale's innocent. Drop that rope, you men! Fifty Shoshoni warriors are coming down that road. Curks is with them. They're horse and buffalo Indians. They bring Curks to tell you Hale is innocent. They come to take Hale away. Get back! Get back!"

And as he spoke he lifted the noose from Hale's neck, and Gorman reached down and cut the cords pinioning his hands at his back. Bewilderment gave way to rage in some; others found they were much afraid. Gorman and Riply kept between Hale and the mob. But even then some one might have reached him with knife or bullet had it not been for the sudden appearance of the Indians. They came into the bright glare as if emerging from a wall of ebony.

Ahead rode Black Cloud, wonderfully painted and wearing the head-dress of one who has carried the pipe four times on a big war-path. Back of him came Curks, more cadaverous, more anatomical, than ever. A warrior rode on each side of him. Then came the other braves, riding four abreast, so many grim statues in bronze.

Black Cloud stared straight ahead, his gaze centred on Hale. He left it for his braves to watch the flanks.

Riply had slightly exaggerated their numbers, yet there were forty of them.

And as they advanced Riply and Gorman renewed their warning for none to shoot, or interfere with the visitors.

"Listen to Curks!" urged Riply. "Curks, come ahead and speak your piece."

Judge Curks, of Boise City, forged ahead as the Indians came to a halt. Men who were half-minded to open fire on the Indians decided to hear what Sheriff Bowen's friend had to say. Because of his overwhelming rage Curk's voice conveyed but little information at first.

"I was invited to ride to Placerville with this man Riply," he hoarsely announced. "I was captured by these Indians and most inhumanely treated. That villain there," and he turned and pointed to Black Cloud, "ordered his devils to torture me, *me*, a judge in this Territory of Idaho."

"Louder! Louder!" yelled the background of the mob.

"They burned my feet," shrieked Curks. "And this man Riply got me into it."

"Jack Gorman told me he could prove Hale never killed Lucky Tom. He said I must ride to Placerville to get the proof," loudly broke in Riply. "He wanted me to bring Curks as a witness to the evidence, so that Bowen and his friends couldn't say the proof was cooked up. I did so. The Indians scooped us up. Gorman had planned it. He knew they would do it. He did not know they also would take him along as a third witness. Curks was scared by Black Cloud, a friend of Hale's, a leader of the Shoshoni.

"The Indians toasted Curks' feet a bit, and I saw it done. Then Curks told the truth about Lucky Tom's death, and they rubbed bear's oil on his feet and

fetched him back here to talk to you. Now, Curks, tell the truth, or back you go, and they won't stop at your feet the next time." The last was in an aside.

At mention of his name Black Cloud sent his pony alongside of Curks. The Boise City judge cast one glance at the savage face, then measured the uncertain strength of the mob. Behind Black Cloud were the Indians, forty of them, and they were all ready to act as one, instantly to carry out their leader's orders. Of the mob there were left between two and three hundred men, many of them drunk, many of them present out of a ferocious curiosity, but unwilling to participate in the killing. They had been hurriedly organised to lynch Hale but not to fight Indians.

"Come, white snake," hissed Black Cloud.

"Oh, God ! Not that !" cried Curks. Then to the wavering gathering : "Lucky Tom was killed by Tod Mushet, Burnham and Weber Joe. Weber Joe confessed to me the night he was killed. I—I intended to tell at the proper time. Weber Joe told me how they shot the miner from behind thinking he was Hale. I believe the man told me the truth." Then to Riply, "Now may I go, sir, or are these damn hounds to have me again ? "

"Wait !" called out Hale. And his right hand went to Curk's face until the ear was locked between the thumb and first finger. "Tell who killed my father in 'fifty-nine. Don't lie, or I'll talk in Shoshoni to Black Cloud."

Curks wet his dry lips and proclaimed :—

"Mushet, Burnham and Weber Joe killed Hale's father six years ago."

"Just a moment, Curks. Is that you, Vantine ? Did you hear the words of Judge Curks ? Good ? You'll assure the committee Hale is innocent ? " cried Gorman.

"Some of them are here. We tried to stop the mob from taking Hale, but they were too strong for us. We'll make a better argument now," answered the merchant from the back of the crowd.

And what the girl had taken to be an uneasy stirring in the crowd now resolved itself into the steady advance of a file of determined citizens, each man openly carrying weapons.

A grotesque element was introduced into the strained situation when the man who had carried the rope suddenly yelled:—

"Every one's gone to find the Lucky Gulch diggings! I'm off!"

His precipitate desertion acted as a signal for a general dispersal. Jack Gorman then took time to run to Miss Harry's window. He tilted back his head and greeted her:—

"Close shave, but thanks to you we came in time to turn the jack. It's been Black Cloud's game. My part was to decoy Riply and Curks to Placerville where the Injuns was hiding outside the town. And darn their red hides if they didn't take me along with t'others for good measure! Oughter seen how quick Curk took water when they stretched his feet over the fire."

"I've got to say something to you, Jack Gorman," said the girl. "It may be hard listening for you, but I hope not."

While she leaned out the window and talked rapidly and earnestly the citizens' committee assumed entire control of the prisoner. After Curks had been induced for a second time to recite Weber Joe's confession quick action was taken formally to declare Hale innocent and at liberty to depart. A delegation was appointed to wait on Bowen in the jail and inform him Hale was not to be troubled again. His killing of the three

assassins was voted to be a wholesome act and not one to be criticised by the tardy courts.

Hale was somewhat dazed by the swift changes in his affairs. He shook hands in a mechanical fashion, and listened to congratulation that his ears did not hear. He was conscious only of Black Cloud's haughty bearing and the picture formed by the girl at the window with Gorman staring up at her. After the handshaking was finished Hale reached out a hand for Black Cloud to clasp. No words were said, but the grip of their fingers told it all.

Gorman now came to him, a peculiar expression on his lively face.

"Shoshoni," he began, "how happen you were caught in the daytime without a chance to use your guns?"

Hale drew him aside and whispered:—

"You must never tell any one this. Old Idaho betrayed me. He was in hiding and looking on when I was taken. I saw him. The bottom of my heart just dropped plumb out. I quit, meek as a sheep."

"Good Heavens! That makes him bad as Patterson! Yes, worse!" gasped Gorman.

"No. It shows he's crazy. He came to the gulch and asked me to call at the cabin on a certain day; and I hadn't reckoned to go there again, Jack. But he stirred up my hopes; then when I rode into the ambush I didn't have the heart to make any fight. I quit cold. He put the day far enough ahead so he'd have time to come here and give me away to Bowen. But he's a madman. He isn't responsible. I wouldn't tell you a word of this, Jack, if it wasn't for Miss Harry. She must never know. Better take her away, Jack, out of the country. Take her away before she learns the truth from Bowen's blabbing."

With a ghastly attempt at a smile Gorman replied:—

"I don't think I'll take her away, Shoshoni. And she's waiting to talk to you."

"And I'm waiting to thank her for saving my life," muttered Shoshoni as he turned to go to her.

Miss Harry had left the house and was standing before the open door. Now that the danger was over the slight figure was no longer erect. The reaction was tremendous, and only by will power did she keep on her feet. It hurt her to see Hale shaking hands with the citizens, talking with Gorman, talking with every one while she waited. Then Hale was standing beside her.

"Howdy, Shoshoni," she greeted with a brave attempt at unconcern. "Quite a fuss. But it's all ended. Here's your guns. Fetched them along thinking you might be wanting them."

"And you fetched your rifle and saved my neck."

"Oh, shooting comes natural to me. Where's Jack Gorman going?"

"I'll call him back," Hale quickly offered, withdrawing his hand.

"I've had my talk with Jack," she gravely informed him.

"I reckoned you was keen to talk some more with him. I'm leaving this country pretty soon. Pinaquana doesn't like down here. I'm not going to try to thank you for all the fine things you've done for me."

"Ain't your affairs cleared up enough now so's you're free to talk?" she passionately demanded.

"Why—yes," he faltered. "I couldn't talk with the charge of murder hanging over me. Now that charge's wiped out there's no use talking."

"You're talking now like some idiot!" she upbraided him.

"Good Lord! I never did hit you right, Miss Harry—you'll never know how near I once was to saying

certain things—things I ain't any right to say now, nor hint at. Before I reckoned that Gorman——”

“Drat Gorman!” she explosively cried. “See here, if you'll make me say it; how could I tell Gorman I was your girl when you'd never asked me?”

He was silent for a minute, trying to comprehend the potentials of this query. At last he muttered:—

“Was that what Jack meant? That he didn't reckon he'd take you away?”

“He never had any chance—that way. I like him. That's all.” And to his horror she began to whimper.

To comfort her he began to talk even as she had dreamed he might talk some day. Gold-mad miners pressed forward to demand that the girl pilot them to the lost diggings, only to fall back as Hale, still holding his two guns, gave them a glance and gestured for them to retire. Black Cloud rode up and with Indian imperturbability observed the red man's etiquette by refraining from intruding. When Hale paused to get his second wind the girl sighed ecstatically and murmured:—

“I never knew there was such lovely talk in the world. But Shoshoni, tell me; you've always been honest with women?”

“Great snakes, Miss Harry! Women? Why, you're my first experience with the critter. But here's Black Cloud waiting to speak to you. Hear him now, for he 'n' his braves ought to be digging out before some drunken fool takes a shot at 'em. And they're bad people to shoot at.”

He raised his hand, and Black Cloud rode closer. The Indian placed a hand on his breast, where rested the medicine gift, and proudly informed them:—

“The boy-girl's medicine grows stronger every sleep. It makes Black Cloud's eyes see where the eagle cannot see. It makes the Snake God's heart grow warm

toward the Shoshoni. Now Black Cloud goes back to the northern Shoshoni, who live in teepees and make the Sioux run like old women. He will be chief and carry the pipe and dance many scalps."

Hale interpreted for him. The Indian continued :—

" If the boy-girl wants some one killed let her make two smokes on the second ridge north of her home. Some of the Idaho warriors will see it and come to her. Give them this. It will be sent over the mountains to Black Cloud. He will come, singing a new death song for them about to die."

He handed over to her a piece of dressed skin on which was painted a black patch against a field of blue. From the top of the patch extended wavy medicine lines.

Hale explained :—

" A black cloud in the blue sky. The snaky looking lines means he's become a medicine man because of his new medicine. Say something strong. I'll interpret it ! "

Miss Harry reached out both hands and grasped the warrior's sinewy right hand and talked earnestly, the tears standing in her eyes. Black Cloud disapproved of the tears—a sign of weakness. Hale interpreted her speech and included so many extravagant bits of praise —always dear to the red heart—that the Injun expanded his deep chest proudly and said :—

" The boy-girl is very big medicine. They say she does not weep because she is a squaw. They say the water in her eyes is rain medicine, sent by the Snake God. Black Cloud rides down the valley road as far as the old white-haired chief's house."

Hale explained, and urged :—

" Ride along with them, Miss Harry. I'll overtake you in no time. Pinaquana is crazy to run her head off. Their ponies are tired. I'm anxious they get out of town before some drunken scamp starts trouble."

• • • • •

Hale and Black Cloud examined the ashes in the fireplace and agreed no fire had burned there for forty-eight hours. The girl promptly said :—

“ He’s at the gulch. He must be brought back home. His mind isn’t right.”

“ The Indian and I will go. You must stay here. If any prospectors saw you with us they’d follow, thinking you were leading us to the diggings.” Then in Shoshoni :—

“ Let my red brother tell his braves to camp in the cottonwoods till we return. They will watch the cabin while we are gone. There are bad white men riding up and down the valley.”

As they started for the hidden gulch Black Cloud was uneasy and said :—

“ The evil spirits are busy in the ghost place. My medicine tells me it is bad to be there. Black Cloud will go, for his white brother has said the old man has been touched by the Snake God.”

He rested his hand on his head and rotated his extended index finger above his head in the sign for the mentally unbalanced, therefore under the protection of the gods.

They came within a mile of the vine-hidden entrance and Hale was congratulating himself on the absence of wandering prospectors when Black Cloud vehemently exclaimed in English :—

“ No good ! Old man make smoke.”

Hale shaded his eyes against the glare of the sun and said :—

“ I see no smoke. It is haze Black Cloud sees.”

The Indian’s lips curled scornfully.

“ Smoke ! ” he repeated. “ Bad spirits whisper in old man’s ear. Old man make smoke.”

They galloped closer and the smoke became discernible to Hale. First it was a faint perpendicular

streak but quickly increased in volume. Eager to enter and extinguish the fire, they urged their mounts into a gallop, only to pull them down to a walk as a figure burst through the vines. It was Old Idaho, and he was carrying his long muzzle-loading rifle. That he recognised them was evident by his shrill command :—

“ Git back there, Shoshoni Hale. You’re a dead man. You was hung at Idaho City. Don’t you try to ha’nt me. Git back ! ”

Up came the rifle. The Indian went over the side of his pony with only the toes of his moccasin showing, and Hale, stupefied, felt the wind of the bullet. Instantly after firing the old man darted back through the vines.

“ Come along ! ” shouted Hale. “ We must git him before he loads ! ”

“ Evil spirits will load his gun fast ! ” muttered Black Cloud, seizing Pinaquana’s bridle.

“ Let go, Black Cloud ! Stay here. I’ll ride in alone.”

“ Black Cloud’s medicine says my white brother must keep out,” cried the Indian, closing his fingers on Pinaquana’s nose and shutting off her wind.

“ Damn, Black Cloud ! I’d draw a gun on any one else who did that. You’re as crazy as the old man. Let go, I say ! ”

Black Cloud released the struggling mare but threw an arm around Hale’s waist and pulled him from the saddle.

“ Boy-girl’s medicine says stay out,” he grunted as Hale fought to release himself.

Hale ceased his struggling, and growled :—

“ He’s had time to reload, and we must wait till he takes another shot.” They watched the vines, expecting a second bullet. After a minute had passed Hale declared :—

“ I’m going in.”

There was a rumbling and grumbling and the ground

shook beneath them. Then came a prolonged rushing, crashing, roaring sound which increased to a terrific climax. High above the top of the gulch walls billowed and crawled enormous clouds of dust. At first the low sun riddled them with fiery lanes ; then they rolled far outward and obscured the light, and a fine rain of rock debris fell on the two friends.

"Evil spirit tip mountain over ! " whispered Black Cloud, shaken to the depths of his superstitious soul. "Boy-girl medicine very strong. Speaks with straight tongue. Old white-hair first white man to enter there. Evil spirits get him."

"Good God ! The old man toted more powder in there and has pulled the cliffs down on him ! " choked Hale.

They camped outside that night, and by morning the dust clouds had dissipated enough to reveal the top of the eastern wall, although a yellow haze bleached the blue of the heavens for a wide area. Black Cloud would not approach nearer, but worked with his medicine while Hale went to investigate. The corridor was filled in, but by some strange freak the curtain of vines remained practically intact. With immense effort Hale climbed up the old slide until he could gaze into the shallow, murky depression of what had been Lost Gulch. The leaning cliff had fallen, as had the wall by the spring. Huge sections of the opposite wall likewise had been pulled down, and the raw, broken rock had buried the diggings many feet deep from side to side. There was no chance that any living thing could have escaped that terrific deluge of rock.

The band of Indians halted on a low ridge while Hale and the girl rode down the river road to cross the Snake above Old Fort Boise, thence to strike into the Oregon road over the Blue Mountains.

"They're gone, Shoshoni," she said, with a little catch in her voice.

Once more Hale turned and looked back. The forty warriors had vanished, but as he gazed a lone horseman rode to the top of a knoll. It was Black Cloud. He touched his breast, then passed his hand slowly outward at arm's length, and then abruptly struck it edgewise toward the ground.

"He says he is going home," whispered Hale.

The Indian raised his two hands before his chest, holding them a foot apart, and slowly moved them toward and from each other several times; then the right hand was abruptly tossed back.

"He says, 'We shall see each other no more!'"

Hale half-extended his right hand and held his left hand before him, then thrust his right to full arm's length and drew the left back to his side—"Ahead of others," or "Chief." Red and white gave a final flourish of upraised hands and looked back no more, although the plaintive song Black Cloud extemporised in honour of their going accompanied them for some minutes. For several miles Hale stared between the ears of his mare; then a hand tugged at his fringed sleeve, and Miss Harry—as Shoshoni Hale always called his wife—was gently reminding:—

"We must be happy now if we want to be happy in the valley of the Willamette. No gold-hunting, no gun-fighting. Just us."

"Just you."

And his eyes told her more than words ever could.

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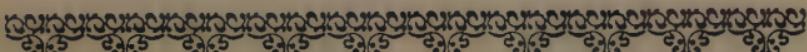
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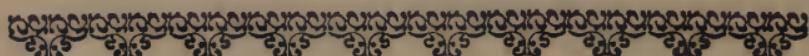
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